The Tyranny of the Past?

Revolution, Retrospection and Remembrance in the work of Irish writer, Eilís Dillon

Volumes I & II

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD in Humanities (English) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the extent to which Eilís Dillon's (1920–94) reliance on memory and her propensity to represent the past was, for her, a valuable motivating power and/or an inherited repressive influence in terms of her choices of genres, subject matter and style. Volume I of this dissertation consists of a comprehensive survey and critical analysis of Dillon's writing. It addresses the thesis question over six chapters, each of which relates to a specific aspect of the writer's background and work. In doing so, the study includes the full range of genres that Dillon employed – stories and novels in both Irish and English for children of various age-groups, teenage adventure stories, as well as crime fiction, literary and historical novels, short stories, poetry, autobiography and works of translation for an adult readership.

The dissertation draws extensively on largely untapped archival material, including lecture notes, draft documents and critical reviews of Dillon's work. It also includes the comments of the author's family and friends recorded in personal interviews, which provide background details on Dillon, and form an assessment of her contribution to literature and the arts. The thesis, in contextualising Dillon's output, takes a biographical and historico-literary approach, while its critical framework is underpinned by the work of relevant theorists in the multidisciplinary areas of memory studies and commemoration. Although recognising the benefits, both individually and in a national context, of the use of literature in a mnemonic sense, this thesis contends that the overuse of memory proved to be a restrictive yet reassuring factor for Eilís Dillon over a long and prodigious career.

In Volume II, Dillon's publications, editions and translations are presented in a searchable digital resource at the website http://research.dho.ie/dillon/, which was created as part of this study and is hosted by the Digital Humanities of Obervatory, http://dho.ie. The digital element of the thesis was undertaken as an integral component of the dissertation in part fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) initiated and supported by St Patrick's

College, Drumcondra, a college of Dublin City University (DCU), and *An Foras Feasa*, National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). Completed in collaboration with two fellow students, the process of digitisation is fully described, from its origins to its delivery online, in the accompanying written dissertation in Volume II.

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Thesis Introduction

Since reflection on the past was an important feature in the work of Irish writer Eilís Dillon (1920–1994), this thesis, borrowing its title from Augustine Martin's phrase describing the consequences of retrospection in Irish literature, focuses on the influence of memory - individual, family and national - in Dillon's writing for children and adults.

Specifically, recognising Martin's view that Irish writing 'since Standish O'Grady, has been almost morbidly fixated with the past', this thesis examines to what degree Dillon's propensity for revisiting historical events was, for her, either a valuable motivating power or an inherited repressive influence.[1] Informed by Martin's claim that 'literary history is strewn with the corpses of talented writers who allowed an inherited mode or sensibility to blind them to the realities of their own age and place', this work also questions whether, or to what extent, Dillon's persistent use of history and memory constituted, for her, a constructive impetus or, conversely, a restrictive force. The writer's proclivity for retrospection is examined as a feature not only of her fictional commemoration of Ireland's culture, history and revolutionary struggle, but also as a possible inhibitor in her personal exploration for identity. Martin's term 'tyranny' is used in the thesis title to question the possibility of an oppressive, limiting influence or a dominant, obstructive authority in the author's life and literature.[2] The word 'revolution' refers to militant nationalism in which Dillon's family was involved from 1916–21, which resulted in eventual Irish independence and important political, social, economic and cultural developments within the new Irish State. Dillon's role in recalling personal and family experience in national matters is encapsulated in the thesis title through the term 'retrospection', while her willingness to honour and commemorate those who participated in Ireland's major historical events is expressed as 'remembrance'.

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[1] Standish O'Grady, author of several histories of Ireland and stories for children, was regarded as 'one of the most energetic and influential figures of late nineteenth century Irish cultural history'. Patrick Maume, *Éire – Ireland*, Irish-American Cultural Institute, 39.1 & 2 (2004): 11–35, 15 Aug. 2010 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/eire-ireland/v039/39.1maume.html.

[2] Augustine Martin, "Inherited Dissent: The Dilemma of the Irish Writer," *Bearing Witness: Essays on Anglo-Irish Literature*, ed. Anthony Roche (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996) 83; 95. 'The tyranny of the past' is a paragraph heading within Martin's argument.

This thesis is the first broad critical survey of Dillon's writing and forms a major study of her work across a variety of genres; children's and teenage adventure stories, crime, literary and historical fiction for adults, as well as short stories, poetry and translation. Extensive use has been made of largely untapped archival material, including lecture notes and articles that provide considerable background detail on the author and her writing. Some attention is also given to unpublished material for the insight that it provides into the author's literary intentions. In addition, the website presented in Volume Two of this research allows easy access to relevant bibliographic details of Dillon's publications and their various editions and translations.[3] This thesis, therefore, provides an overview of the author's prodigious output and an evaluation of her contribution to Irish literary and cultural life.

Dillon is a worthy subject for a study of this magnitude since, from the early 1950s, she established herself as a professional writer for children and adults, and published more than fifty works in a variety of genres, over a forty-year period. She also participated enthusiastically in cultural and literary bodies, among them the Irish Children's Book Trust, the Irish Writers' Centre and the Arts Council. As a reputable translator, she served for a period of seven years on the Catholic Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, established in 1963 after the Second Vatican Council. Her considerable achievements were acknowledged through her membership of *Aosdána* in 1981 and her conferral with a *D.Lit Honoris Causa* from University College Cork in 1988. Her contribution to Irish cultural life was such that she was compared to Lady Gregory as a cultural influence and as a woman of letters.[4] Yet despite this appreciation expressed at the time of her death in 1994, Dillon's writing has failed to endure in the public consciousness. She has, however, been particularly recognised within the children's literature community in *Treasure Islands*, a study of Irish children's literature, as well as in articles and essays that will be cited later in this study.[5] Conversely, Dillon's work for adults is referenced in a much more limited way in relevant publications. While Dillon is listed in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* and is included marginally by some commentators,[6] her omission from major literary studies, most notably from the volume of the *Field Day Anthology* on Irish women's writing, is indicative of a lack of acknowledgement of her as a significant figure within Irish literature.[7] By focusing on various aspects of Dillon's work and life, this study responds to this lack of critical attention and explores Dillon's place within the continuum of Irish literature for both children and adults.

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[3] Anne Marie Herron, *The Published Works of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations* (2010) http://research.dho.ie/dillon/index.html.

[4] Declan Kiberd, "Eilís Dillon Mercier – An Appreciation,". *Irish Times* [Dublin] 21 July 1994.

Thesis Organisation

This thesis is underpinned by considered contextual and conceptual frameworks, which are outlined in this introduction. The exploration of Dillon's work necessitates awareness of the significant contextual factors that impinged on her literary career. Since the inquiry refers to noteworthy episodes and periods in Dillon's personal life, a rationale is provided within this introduction for the inclusion of a biographical approach to Dillon's work throughout this study. Other contextual factors are also explained, including the historical milieu of the early twentieth century into which Dillon was born, the spirit of both nationalism and cultural nationalism that existed at that time, the social and literary circumstances from which she emerged, as well as the status of childhood as understood in the early and mid-twentieth century in Ireland. The accompanying theoretical framework is founded on the relationship between individual and collective memory and its interaction with history, and draws on the work of a number of theorists in the areas of sociology, history and literature for its ideological base.

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[5] Mary Shine Thompson & Celia Keenan, eds. *Treasure Islands: Studies in Children's Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006).

[6] James McGuire & James Quinn, eds. *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Royal Academy of Ireland, 2009) 4 Apr. 2011 http://dib.cambridge.org/. Dillon is also mentioned in Ann Owens Weekes, *Unveiling Treasures, The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993); in James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel, A Critical History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988); and *Great Hatred Little Room, The Irish Historical Novel* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983).

[7] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Margaret MacCurtain, Siobhán Kilfeather, Angela Bourke, Maria Luddy, Mary O'Dowd, Gerardine Meaney, Clair Wills, eds. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing – Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, Vols. IV & V (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

The methodological approach to the thesis, and the conventions adhered to within it, will also be outlined in detail later in this introduction.

The six chapters that follow this thesis introduction will question in various ways how continual retrospection on Ireland's past from Norman times onwards affected Eilís Dillon, both personally and professionally. In the light of her deep attachment to her family and ancestral history, Chapter One will examine the influence that Dillon's personal background exerted on her and will also identify some significant literary influences. It will highlight the challenges experienced by Dillon as a member of a very successful and influential family, and the sort of memories received and internalised by her as a result. This highly-charged familial and political environment, however, is tempered by the writer's other memories of the language and landscape of her childhood in the west of Ireland.

Chapter Two will analyse how this idealised location and its people were significant in determining Dillon's regard for the Irish language, its value in literature, her incidental use of it in fiction and her formal usage of it in works of translation. The landscape and language of the west of Ireland, as encountered during her youth, informed Dillon's strong belief that children should be imbued with traditional values and inculcated into Irish mores. Chapter Three will demonstrate that this belief was a crucial factor in her unflagging didacticism and her determined representation of the island communities of the previous generation in her writing for children. The traditional use of the island as a setting in children's literature, and as a means of providing an unchanging rural idyll for adventure stories, will also be discussed, as will the added role of that remote location in enabling the author herself to escape metaphorically from a changing world. Chapter Four will analyse Dillon's retrieval of the memory of a disappearing past, as evidenced in her crime novels and in her family sagas which are described as 'literary' novels.[8] Her experimentation within these genres as part of what she deemed her apprenticeship as a writer, will be assessed in the context of her choice of Big House settings that were redolent of a vanishing lifestyle in a newly independent Ireland. Chapter Five will focus further on Dillon's reliance for much of her fictional representations on her personal or individual memory and on inherited impressions of a life and society that had evolved within an Ascendancy milieu. Her extensive historical knowledge, interwoven with family memory, will be assessed for its place within her overall literary output and its commemorative role in her historical fiction. Since this dissertation is retrospective in focus, Chapter Six will contrast the author's vision of her possible legacy against the recognition, both official and informal, awarded to her as a writer. Drawing on the reminiscences of family, friends and colleagues narrated in personal interviews, this final chapter will assess her literary legacy, her considerable contribution to literature and the arts, her desire to be remembered and the ways in which she is recalled by those who knew her. Their impressions will help to complete the picture of Dillon as a literary and cultural figure.

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[8] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, Eilís Dillon, Author Profile (Rue Morgue Press: 2009) 4 Apr. 2010 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors/dillon.html.

The Thesis Conclusion forms a résumé of the findings of this study and presents Dillon's over-dependence on the past as restrictive when viewed objectively by the critic but as, nonetheless, of potential value to the author herself. By providing the settings and characters that she wished to present and the themes that she was most content to explore, Dillon was enabled to forge a career as a popular writer within a number of genres.

Thesis Framework

Contextual Framework

Biographical Context

As a means of understanding Dillon's work and life, and in order to examine the extent to which she relied on the remembered narratives of influential family members for her historical writings, a biographical note has been included in Appendix A. In addition, this dissertation identifies significant events in the author's life as relevant to her work. This approach takes its lead from the nineteenth-century literary historian Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve who states that at the heart of great critical practice is the assumption that literary texts cannot stand alone. Sainte-Beuve's conviction is summarised as follows: 'Incomplete at best, potentially deceptive at times, the literary work must be read in relation to the complex set of factors influencing its author and leading to its production'. He believes that literature is determined not by creative genius but by far more mundane factors, notably '*du sang, de la parenté, de la famille, de la race, du sol, du climat* (heritage, affiliation, family, race, land and climate)'. In the case of Eilís Dillon, similar extrinsic factors played a major role in the development of her writing and cannot be divorced from its content. An awareness of these features has formed a firm foundation for the critical analysis of her work within this study. As the acclaimed practitioner of what he termed 'literary portraiture', Sainte-Beuve went to great extremes to understand his writer as subject. He claimed that, in order to do this, one must try to present the author 'in all his various aspects', 'to make him live, move and speak as he must have done, follow him towards a private inner space and in his daily habits'.[9] Although this study does not adopt such intrusive inquiry, it aims to gain insight into Dillon not only directly through her texts but also through the familial and social factors that impacted on her as a writer. By providing information in her personal documents, Dillon has afforded the researcher a glimpse into her daily life, motivations and thought processes. Many of the opinions and beliefs revealed in these manuscripts are reiterated by her fictional characters, in an intermingling that consistently challenges the reader to differentiate between the authorial voice and that of her subjects.

With such personal input evident in Dillon's work, it is crucial to be aware of the arbitrary and subjective nature of individual stories, and the selectivity and unreliability of memory in narrative. This is relevant since many of Dillon's documents were intended for presentation on lecture tours or for publication in various media, and were retained and preserved by the author, possibly for later reference by family or other interested parties. Dillon, with strong personal allegiances, consistently presented issues relating to family and to Ireland's revolutionary past in a favourable light. It has therefore been essential, when assessing these documents and quoting from them, to maintain objectivity and impartiality. Nonetheless, Dillon's opinion pieces are elucidating and indicate the characteristic strengths and insecurities that have a bearing on her choice of genres and the content of her work. In order to provide balance and to supplement Dillon's biographical image, the comments and opinions of contributing interviewees were recorded, transcribed and quoted within the text. Sainte-Beuve, with his reliance on biographical detail, likened literary criticism to travel; a journey with the author, embarked upon with the openness and curiosity that are essential to discovery.[10] A similar spirit of critical inquiry is at the centre of this research.

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[9] Daniel Brewer, "Writing History Belatedly," *Literature, Literary History and Cultural Memory – REAL Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 21, eds. Herbert Grabes & Gunter Narr (Tubingen: Verlag, 2005) 67.

Historical Context

The Dillon and Plunkett families played an important part in Irish life and history for generations and, as a result, Eilís Dillon can be connected directly, through her ancestors on both sides, to military and political developments in Ireland for centuries. From their arrival at the time of the Norman Conquest in 1169, the two families can be linked to almost every significant event in Irish life and to the various personalities involved in social and political movements. The imposition of foreign power in Ireland from the twelfth century onwards – effected through territorial acquisition, the introduction of settlers and punitive laws regarding land, language and religion – secured Ireland's status as a colony until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921. Apart from the effects of 'administrative power',[11] there had also been 'the assertion of ethnic or cultural superiority over a supposedly inferior indigenous people'[12] that had led to a history of military, cultural, religious and linguistic resistance, as well as the resulting sense of cultural loss and dispossession.[13] Irish cultural nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a major part in the reclamation of Irishness and the assertion of Irish authenticity as distinct from the identity of the colonial power.

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[10] Brewer 67.

[11] Terry Eagleton, Afterword: Ireland and Colonialism, *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. Terence McDonough (Dublin, Portland, Or: Irish Academic Press, 2005) 326.

[12] Denis O'Hearn, "Ireland in the Atlantic Economy," *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750–1950s*, eds. Oliver MacDonagh, WF Mandle & Pauric Travers (Canberra, London and Basinstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1983) 4.

[13] Eagleton 327.

Dillon, born in 1920 at a time of political upheaval and monumental change in Ireland, has particular connections with a period when Ireland moved from its perceived status as colony to independent state. The events of the period of transition in the early part of the twentieth century impacted greatly on the young Dillon who was very aware of family participation in the events of 1916 and in the War of Independence, and the radicalisation of popular opinion that occurred at this time. She was equally conscious of the divisive effects of the Irish Civil War of 1922–23 and of the partition of the country that resulted in six Ulster counties remaining under British rule to form Northern Ireland, while the remaining twenty-six counties became the Irish Free State. However, Dillon's focus was not confined to these immediate events, since the more distant histories of the Dillons and Plunketts were also well recorded and supplemented by personal accounts of travel and significant encounters. The families maintained a keen interest in their connections to historical events and a strong awareness of their contribution. Dillon's mother Geraldine (1891–1986), who herself recorded details of her life and times, summarises, for example, the momentous nature of the era through which her paternal grandfather Patrick Plunkett (1817–1918) lived: he could recall radical changes in Irish life from Daniel O'Connell's attainment of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 to the 1916 Rising.[14] Eilís Dillon was, in turn, privy to these memories throughout her childhood, so that most of the major political personalities of the previous three generations became household names. Traumatic national events such as the Rising of 1798 and the Famine of 1847 were placed within the imaginative grasp of Dillon as she grew up in this storytelling, family environment.[15]

Nationalism and Patriotism in Context

This dissertation identifies Dillon, who was born into a family whose members not only had strong nationalist affiliations but were also politically active, as nationalists and patriots. The terms nationalism and patriotism as used within this study require clarification. Conceptually, nationalism, according to historian Hugh

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[14] Geraldine Plunkett Dillon, *All in the Blood: A Memoir*, ed. Honor Ó Brolcháin (Dublin: A & A Farmar, 2006) 8.

[15] Dillon recounts a story linking her grandfather with 1798. See Chapter One of this dissertation.

Kearney, is 'riddled with ambiguity', and often refers 'to political movements aiming at a great measure of independence for a group of individuals who see themselves as a nation'.[16] In addition, the issue of the nation encompassing the whole island of Ireland has remained controversial and has resulted in a tendency to place 'emphasis less on the ideological content and complexities of national thought than on its political expression'.[17] Ernest Renan's definition of the nation as 'a soul, a spiritual principle' that is constituted through a combination of the past and the present, is pertinent to this examination of Dillon and her reliance on individual and collective memory as the source for her life's work.[18] Renan's concept of the nation as founded in the past has particular resonance for Dillon's celebration of her ancestry, an aspect of her work that is revealed throughout this dissertation. He states:

> The nation like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory [...] this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people.[19]

This view of solidarity emerging from a heroic past is relevant to Dillon's heightened awareness of her family's important role in Ireland's political and cultural development, and her own eagerness to contribute also to Irish life. The idea of the nation as based on a commonality of language, religion, race and the desire for shared territory was, as described by the author herself, at the heart of the Plunkett and Dillon philosophies. The extent to which Dillon engaged with the cult of her own ancestry through her writing will be examined throughout this thesis.

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[16] Hugh F. Kearney, "Parnell and Beyond: nationalism in these islands, 1880–1980," *Ireland, Contested Ideas of Nationalism and History*, ed. Hugh F. Kearney (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007) 111.

[17] HV Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the late nineteenth century," MacDonagh et al. 258.

[18] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" *Nation and Narration*, trans. Martin Thom, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) 19.

[19] Renan 19.

The revolutionary aspect so often emphasised in Ireland is not the only expression of nationhood, since nationalism can also 'be a strong emotional disposition, or habit of mind, or social or political intention'.[20] This latter interpretation was articulated by Benedict Anderson, who, while concurring that it is 'notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse', concludes that the nation is 'an imagined political community', created by a feeling of connectedness, not necessarily defined by territory. He clarifies that the 'nation state' is a political unit delineated by precise physical boundaries, whereas the idea of 'nation' relates to a kinship bound by tradition and heritage, and often by ethnicity, linguistics, culture and literature. A sense of connectedness evolves even at a distance since, as Anderson explains, 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each, they carry the image of their communion'.[21] Military confrontation is just one expression of this psychological connection in that 'the pull of the nation is so great that people are willing to fight and die in its defence'.[22]

Another aspect of that connection is forged through cultural nationalism, which entails a commitment to political, civic, ethnic and cultural development. Ireland's distinct cultural and linguistic traditions had been unifying features for those who were active in the struggle to assert independence in successive generations and were given expression through the cultural and literary revivals of the late nineteenth century. The nationalist dream culminated in the vision of the leaders of the 1916 Rising to whom Dillon referred as 'poets of the revolution', thereby solidifying the links between political and cultural nationalism.[23]

Both of these forms of nationalism are often overlaid by a spirit of romantic nationalism, a powerful mystique almost religious in fervour, which recognises the nation as sacred in terms of its people, its land and its history. Giovanni Costigan identifies the 'salient characteristics' of this form of nationalism as: a sense of the depth of history and the origin of national roots, the idealisation of folk culture, the revival of language, belief in the cult of hero, emphasis on blood sacrifice, personification of the nation, the revival of chivalry and the probability of failure with its attaching nobility.[24] All of these attributes attach easily to Ireland's struggle for independence as articulated by Dillon in her depictions of the country's past in her publications for both adults and children. Many writers who preceded and succeeded Dillon, as well as Dillon herself, have in their work linked various forms of nationalism to the regeneration and maintenance of the nation. Literature has, over generations, presented a means for deepening this link. The novel, in particular, described by Timothy Brennan as 'joining the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media', has been significant as a means of enabling people to consolidate the imagined community. Brennan further notes that the rise of the nation state in Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is 'inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature'. The novel, with its capacity to merge fiction with the world outside it, could allow 'ideological dissemination' on a large scale, and create 'the conditions where people could begin to think of themselves as a nation of shared ideas'.[25]

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[20] Vincent Buckley, "Poetry and the Avoidance of Nationalism," MacDonagh et al. 83.
[21] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991) 13; 15.
[22] Ian Marsh, *Sociology, Making Sense of Society*, eds. Ian Marsh & Mike Keating (Harlow: Pearson, 2006) 477.
[23] Dillon, 33323, "Poets of the Revolution".

Eilís Dillon, through her own reading, understood the importance of the novel as an ideological force. In particular, she admired the work of the nineteenth-century French and Russian novelists whom she commended not only for their literary skills and 'superb characterisation' but also for their inclusion of historical events and their simultaneous ability to connect with the affairs of their time, thereby influencing contemporary society.[26] It was a natural extension for her to use her fiction, either consciously or unconsciously, to promulgate the family nationalist sentiments sourced through memory. However, Dillon's approach was not aimed at fomenting or encouraging rebellious behaviour but was directed instead at replacing it with a patriotic fervour expressed in peaceful participation in the future construction of the nation.

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[24] Giovanni Costigan, "Romantic Nationalism: Ireland and Europe," *Irish University Review* 3.2 (Autumn, 1973): 141-152, 6 June 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25477703.

[25] Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) 49; 50; 52.

[26] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 3-4.

The terms patriotism and nationalism 'are often confused both in everyday parlance and in scholarly discussion', since both involve 'commitment to one's country, a special concern with its well-being (and perhaps that of one's fellow members) and a readiness to make sacrifices on its behalf especially in times of crisis'. However, distinctions can be made. While both terms entail 'love of, identification with and a special concern for a certain entity', the object of that identification differs. For patriotism that entity is *patria*, one's country, and for nationalism it is *natio*, one's nation. Patriotism in its most literal interpretation can be love of the physical landscape and its beauty, but in essence involves much more in terms of duty to the *patria* and a willingness to serve in whatever capacity is necessary. While the imagined nationalist community may resort to military expression, patriotism is viewed as more benign, 'measured, reasonable, responsible' and as a rational yet not 'uncritical commitment'.[27] Although the two concepts have much in common, nationalism perceives the nation state as outward evidence and validation of its existence, while patriotism forms the sentiment of devotion which often accompanies nationalist action, both pacifist and military. Eilís Dillon living in an independent Ireland with, for the most part, an absence of the sort of conflict that had marked the foundation of the State, could reflect on the contribution of her family members as nationalists and patriots as narrated to her, and explore their experiences through her writing. Her approach was to merge the two concepts in her personal commitment, which she explains by stating that 'nationalism or patriotism stand just for the right of every person everywhere to his own stability, his own traditions and his own way of life'.[28] The title of one of Dillon's novels, *Blood Relations*, draws together the various threads of both, in describing the physical and emotional blood ties of the family, the sentimental attachment to Ireland, the kinship of relationships within the nationalist community and the blood sacrifice, with its religious connotation and romantic ideals of the poets who gave their lives for Ireland in 1916. Reference to Renan's theory of the nation as linked to the past but defined in the present, with continued renewal and reinterpretation of its ideology, is particularly appropriate to this study of Dillon. His belief that the nation, in order to stay current, needs constant regeneration and reinvention, involving 'a daily plebiscite', based on 'the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life', is also significant.[29] Both the Dillon and Plunkett families, while perhaps not engaged in a 'daily' affirmation of the nation, had, since their arrival almost a millennium before, maintained a consistent allegiance to the island of Ireland and demonstrated their wish to play a significant role in their country's development. Dillon, as a committed nationalist with an inherited sense of patriotic duty, perpetuated this involvement in public affairs by engaging enthusiastically with Ireland's literary and cultural progress. This commitment will be examined in Chapter Six.

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[27] Igor Primoratz & Alexsandar Pavkovic, eds. Introduction and "Mapping the Terrain," *Patriotism: Philosophical and Political Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008) 3; 18; 12.
[28] "Kay Kent talks to Eilís Dillon," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 5 Mar. 1974.

Literary Context

While Dillon's career spans much of the twentieth century, it is also viewed, in this thesis, in relation to various literary developments from long before, as well as within, that time frame. It can be considered in the light of her allegiance to the ancient tradition of the Irish language, her affiliation to Anglo-Irish writing, as well as to contemporary trends. Dillon's knowledge of Irish provided her with access to the work of the great Irish women poets writing from the sixteenth century onwards. Equally, her privileged background and chosen affiliation to WB Yeats allowed her to align herself within the Anglo-Irish tradition. The term Anglo-Irish in a historical context referred to the dominant, largely Protestant, social and land-owning elite, later known as the Ascendancy.[30] From the end of the nineteenth century, members of this class, among them some Catholics such as Dillon's ancestors, contributed significantly to Irish society, not only as political leaders but also as pioneers in the areas of literature and the arts, and were instrumental in the aforementioned cultural and literary revivals. Anglo-Irish literature initially referred to 'that body of writings in English produced by the English settlers and their descendants',[31] but came to be more generally used to describe writings on Irish themes by Irish writers in the English language, although it has always 'carried much broader cultural, social, religious and political implications'.[32] During and after the War of Independence, the Ascendancy, previously a powerful and privileged group, declined in numbers and importance. Violent attacks on them and destruction of their large properties by militant nationalist groups caused many of the remaining landowners to flee the country to a safer life in Britain, while others, like members of the Plunkett family, struggled to maintain their homes.[33] A flavour of the life that they had led remains in what became known as Big House literature, a genre from which Dillon borrowed with a variety of emphases, for the settings of her adult novels.

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[29] Renan 19.

[30] GC Bolton, "The Anglo-Irish and the Historians, 1830–1980," *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750–1950s*, eds. Oliver MacDonagh, WF Mandle & Pauric Travers (Canberra, London & Basinstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1983) 239.

By infusing her historical novels with both nationalist and Ascendancy tropes, Dillon to some extent followed a tradition of the narration of Ireland's history by women writers from the late seventeenth century onwards, as they sought to portray nationalist ideals while also aiming for popular appeal. For example, as early as 1692, the anonymous work *Vertue Rewarded: The Irish Princess*,[34] dealt with the 'rightful sovereignty of Ireland' and Sarah Butler's novel *Irish Tales* (1716) portrayed the Viking colonisation of Ireland. *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* (1781), with 'its celebration of all things Irish' and its 'enthusiastic' Irish nationalist sentiment is also seen as significant in the evolution of historical fiction, while including conventional romance.[35] However it is Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) that was regarded as 'the first fictional book to make Irish history and politics central to its story and theme'.[36] Although merging didacticism and romanticism, with its 'explicit fictional engagement with the Act of

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[31] Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: the literary imagination in a hyphenated culture* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) 3.

[32] FSL Lyons, "Yeats and the Anglo-Irish Twilight," in MacDonagh et al. 212.

[33] Moynahan 3.

[34] The work is attributed to a female writer, "The Authoress of Emeline."

[35] Ian Campbell Ross, "The Triumph of Prudence over Passion: Nationalism and Feminism in an Eighteenth-Century Irish Novel," *Irish University Review* 10.2 (Autumn, 1980): 232-240, 10 July 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25477352.

[36] Cahalan 16.

Union and its real or imagined consequences for Ireland', it is generally accepted as a forerunner to the historical genre.[37]

Other female Anglo-Irish writers followed by publishing what was regarded as popular fiction that appealed in particular to the English public. Sydney Owenson, also known as Lady Morgan (1776–1859), a writer who 'proved that a profit could be made singing Ireland's praises'[38] is known for her positive narration of the 'national tale' in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). The novel, which seeks a marriage of minds between English and Irish traditions, describes an English absentee landlord who, on visiting Ireland, discovers in 'a landscape assumed to be barren' an unexpected wealth of beauty, aristocratic culture and venerable antiquity. The allegorical marriage of the two protagonists presents an ideal combination of English and Celtic traditions, consolidating their cultural links. Later, writer and poet Emily Lawless (1845–1913), whose novels dealt with the 'interspace' between those traditions, was seen as combining nationalist feeling with unionist sympathies.[39] Her 'historical and imaginative' writings set in the beautiful landscape of the Burren were described as being able to 'draw nearer to the soul of the West of Ireland than any other books' and as depicting 'the strange inner life that ebbs and flows in the Irish people'.[40]

Along with paving the way for historical fiction, Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, with its 'slyly subversive depiction of gentry in decline'[41] is also recognised as 'inaugurating the Big House motif in Irish fiction', a genre that has endured for almost two centuries.[42] Those who followed in their depictions of Ascendancy Ireland and its inter-connectedness with the local Irish people, devised as Rafroidi describes 'the ingredients of the national fiction to come'. They wrote of the relationship between the landlord class and their tenants, the crumbling mansions that symbolised the end of Anglo-Irish identity and security, and 'the disappearance of civilised beauty and permanence'.[43] An enduring tradition evolved through successful women writers with their revealing portraits of the landlord classes, and studies of impending ruin and loss of status. Famously, Somerville and Ross in *The Irish RM* stories (1899; 1908) described with comic intrigue the interactions between the colonial elite and the native Irish and the 'mistrustful dependence between landlords and tenantry', while also showing sensitivity to the plight of both classes.[44] Their novel *The Real Charlotte* (1894), while mainly a character study of the heroine and of the Protestant minority, also provides background insights into conditions of poverty in the last decade of nineteenth-century Ireland. Some decades later, Elizabeth Bowen in *The Last September* (1929), showing the formerly Ascendant class as 'lurching precipitously towards its liminal role in a new nation', is seen as forming a bridge between these writers and those who later in the twentieth century renewed the conventions of the genre while reasserting its tropes.[45] Molly Keane and Jennifer Johnston, continued with close observations of lives that were radically changed by war and political events, while also describing the slow, sad deterioration of 'Irish houses that once stood alone and proud in the landscape'.[46] The so-called Big Houses of the genre as it evolved were not, in Bowen's explanation, of the calibre of the great houses found in England but were regarded as big in the Irish context, either due to their height in comparison to local houses or, as she suggests facetiously, due to the grand notions of their inhabitants. Their gentlemen owners engaged in rural sporting activities, involved themselves in the arts and kept well-stocked libraries. Bowen adds that their children, as time went on, grew up 'farouche, haughty and quite ignorant of the outside world'.[47] Dillon in her turn included the Big House as a setting, but also used a broad panorama of political events outside the walls of the demesne. She presented the decline of this world as it coincided with militant and romantic nationalism, while simultaneously promoting in her novels an idealised alliance between the landlord and tenant classes. Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin suggests that students of Big House themes should be directed to Dillon's crime and historical novels and to two of her children's books.[48] Although Dillon herself did not like categorisation or 'labels of any kind' in the arts, she can be associated with this genre in its merging of two narratives.[49] As Kreilkamp explains, there is inherent in Big House fiction, a 'symbiotic relationship' between 'the invented narrative and the story we call history'.[50] Dillon engaged with both in her historical fiction.

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[37] Ian Campbell Ross, "Irish Fiction before the Union," *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fiction*, ed. Jacqueline Beranger (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005) 34.

[38] Cahalan 30.

[39] Heidi Hansson, *Emily Lawless (1845-1913): Writing 'The Interspace'* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007).

[40] Stopford A. Brooke MA, Preface,*With the Wild Geese*, by Emily Lawless (London: Ibister, 1902) 1 June 2011 http://www.archive.org/stream/withwildgeese00lawliala#page/n7/mode/2up.

[41] Vera Kreilkamp, "The Novel of the Big House," *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction*, ed. John Wilson Foster (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 61.

[42] Kersti Tarien Powell, *Irish Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 115.

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[43] Patrick Rafroidi, "A Question of Inheritance: The Anglo-Irish Tradition," *The Irish Novel in our Time*, eds. Patrick Rafroidi & Maurice Harmon (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1975-6) 12.

[44] Robert Tracy, Foreword to *The Irish Scene in Somerville and Ross*, Julie Anne Stevens (Dublin: Irish Academic Press 2007) xii

[45] Kreilkamp, "The Novel" 13.

[46] Colm Tóibín, Foreword, *The Real Charlotte*, by OE Somerville & Martin Ross (London: Capuchin Classics, 2011) 11.

[47] Elizabeth Bowen, "The Big House" (1940) *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986).

Wary of being branded within a particular form, Dillon experimented with several other genres and followed in various traditions as her career progressed. For example, emulating other popular women writers, she engaged for a time in crime writing. She also, intermittently, sought to achieve expertise with the short story, a genre that came to the fore in Ireland in the repressive middle years of the twentieth century. Indeed, Dillon looked for literary inspiration to Seán O'Faoláin (1900–91) in particular who, with other short-story writers and novelists, 'maintained a sharp antagonistic' commentary on contemporary society, often to the detriment of their careers, by being banned for their efforts.[51] Dillon's response to the short story and to contemporary trends will be examined in later chapters of this dissertation, as will her cultural endeavours from the 1960s, at the start of a more prosperous and artistic era when, according to Kiberd, 'writers were enjoined to engage with a new confident Ireland'.[52] Attention will also be drawn to her selection of genres across six decades of the twentieth century as Ireland developed as an independent state and as Dillon herself sought to find her individual voice.

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[48] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 4 Apr. 2010 http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.
[49] Dillon, 33253, "Using History as a Background," Lecture, Listowel, 1988.
[50] Kreilkamp, *The Big House* 3.
[51] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland, The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage Books, 1996) 580.
[52] Kiberd 581.

Social Context

Dillon began her writing career in the late 1940s, a period marked by stasis following independence. Declan Kiberd explains the inertia that was a feature of the time as resulting from the fact that 'war and civil war so drained the energies, that people had little left with which to re-imagine the national condition'.[53] This situation was compounded by the economic policies adopted by successive Irish governments over the following three decades. These were based on protectionism and isolation, resulting in a stagnant industrial base, high levels of unemployment and emigration, low exports and inadequate tax revenue for the State to undertake necessary expenditure.[54] Ireland had remained isolated through the years of World War II and seemed paralysed in a state of economic and cultural depression, and ill equipped to deal with emerging new realities. FSL Lyons described the people in post-war Ireland after six years of isolation from Europe as having 'emerged dazzled, from the cave into the light of day [...] to a new and vastly different world'.[55] The period 1950 to 1960 is described as a 'grim, grey rather bitter decade',[56] a time of 'doom, stagnation, drift, crisis, malaise' and even rather dramatically by writer Anthony Cronin as 'a climate for the death wish'.[57] John Banville sees this period as defined by 'political isolationism, literary censorship, clericalism, cultural chauvinism and provincialism, sexual prudery or even sexual repression, large-scale emigration and so on'.[58] The all-encompassing power of the Catholic Church cannot be underestimated and it was noted that, 'behind extravagant external displays of religious fervour', it was an 'inward looking and deeply repressive society' marked by censorship of the world's greatest writers, the majority of whom were banned on the grounds of sexual indecency.[59]

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[53] Declan Kiberd, "Republicanism and Culture in the New Millennium," *Ireland in the New Century*, ed. Robert J. Savage Jr (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003) 71.

[54] Department of Health and Children, 4 Apr. 2011 http://www.dohc.ie/statistics/health_statistics/table_a1.html. The population continued to fall to a low of 2.9 million in 1961.

[55] FSL Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) 551.

[56] Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998) 262.

[57] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004) 462.

[58] John Banville, "Memory and Forgetting: The Ireland of de Valera and O'Faoláin," *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea & Carmel Quinlan (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004) 31.

[59] John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid, Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000) 277.

However, the fruit of this isolation and repression was the emergence of a new generation of educated writers, 'products of a politically confident new state' who, being 'both more self-assured and more disillusioned with that state' than those before them, became part of a literary renaissance.[60] Notable among them was Seán O'Faoláin who, as literary editor of *The Bell* magazine, was an encouraging force for a new generation of writers, one of whom was Eilís Dillon.

Dillon was fortunate also to witness the advent of prosperity in Ireland as the economic and cultural tide turned from the poverty of the 1950s to the success of the 1960s. Brian Fallon states that certain developments during the 1950s had paved the way for a new Ireland and he contends that the country, without knowing it, 'was mostly in step with the times in her own odd way and at her own peculiar gait'.[61] Fallon points out that underneath the perceived apathy of what appeared to be a static decade, a new progressive spirit had been born. This is supported by Bernard Share's notion of 1950s as 'something of a splendid anachronism' wherein modernisation 'proceeded piecemeal and by stealth'.[62] The economic growth of that time is attributed to the vision of Taoiseach Seán Lemass who, by adopting Keynsian strategies, 'broke free of institutional and ideological inheritance and struck out a path of seeking foreign investment and opening up the economy to more competitive impulses'.[63] Lemass, adopting the John F. Kennedy aphorism 'a rising tide lifts all boats', also believed that economic recovery would benefit all sectors of society and he instilled a sense of confidence and optimism for culture and the arts within this vision for a new Ireland.[64] Lemass understood the interconnectedness of politics, culture and economics, and wanted to pursue

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The Censorship of Publications Act was passed in 1929 and was aimed at prohibiting books which were 'in general tendency indecent or obscene', but viewed by many as a deliberate act of supression that led to the banning of talented Irish and international writers.
Censorship of Publications Act, 1929, *Irish Statute Book*, 6 June 2011
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1929/en/act/pub/0021/index.html.

[60] Clair Wills, *That Neutral Ireland: A History of Ireland during the Second World War* (Faber & Faber, 2007) 13.

[61] Fallon, *An Age of Innocence* 271.

[62] Bernard Share, *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland 1939-45* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1978) 14.

[63] JJ Lee, "From Empire to Europe: The Irish State 1922-73," *Contesting the State: Lessons from the Irish Case*, eds. Maura Adshead, Peadar Kirby & Michelle Miller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) 40.

[64] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Public Papers of Presidents of the U.S.*, Speech, Greers Ferry Dam, Heber Springs, Arkansas (3 Oct. 1963) 18 Jan. 2011
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9455#axzz1OhCN9b1b.

the best outcomes in every sphere of national activity. He was interested in the arts, had a respect for artistic endeavour and saw the benefits of keeping the 'cultural ship afloat'.[65] Eilís Dillon, having grown up in the post-independent Ireland and having experienced the conservatism of the 1940s and 50s, was able nonetheless to appreciate and embrace a new social outlook towards culture, literature and the arts in general, in a more prosperous economic climate.

Childhood in Context

Childhood, for much of the twentieth century, continued to suffer from its historically low status. Mary Shine Thompson suggests that, although elements of the 'bourgeois child-centredness' that existed in Britain in the 1900s found their way into Irish life, these were 'countered by a pervasive puritanism and a sense of innate sinfulness' in relation to children. She refers to Fr Timothy Corcoran SJ who had a profound influence on the direction of Irish educational policy and whose writings 'emphasise the corrupt nature of the child and the consequent necessity for strict authoritarian teaching'.[66] The reality was far from the idealised notion of Yeats who, in his use of the symbolic child, like the Romantic British poets, extolled the innocence of youth, while neglecting to highlight the indignity and hardship that children endured. In his autobiographical novel, *Children of the Dead End* (1914), Patrick MacGill depicts the dehumanising experience of poverty and indignity of the Hiring Fairs. He embodies this heartbreaking feature of Irish life where childhood was sacrificed to economic necessity as children supplied farm labour at home or were sold into farm or domestic work at a young age.[67] Just ten years later, Eilís Dillon saw at first hand the poverty of rural Ireland when she attended her local school in Connemara, a vivid experience which was in contrast to her own upper-class privilege.[68] The squalor she remembered in the countryside was replicated in the horrendous slum conditions of the cities.

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[65] John Horgan, *Seán Lemass* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan) 138.

[66] Mary Shine Thompson, "Republicanism and Childhood in Twentieth Century Ireland," *The Republic: A Journal of Contemporary and Historical Debate* (3 July 2003): 90-112, 18 Jan. 2011 http://theirelandinstitute.com/republic/03/pdf/shinethompson003.pdf.

[67] Richard Breen, "Farm Servanthood in Ireland, 1900-40," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 36.1, Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Economic History Society (Feb. 1983): 87-102, 10 July 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/2598899.

[68] Eilís Dillon, *Inside Ireland* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) 90.

Attendance at school was poor, disease was rife, hunger an everyday reality and infant mortality very high. However, these difficulties serve merely as a backdrop within Dillon's adult fiction and are largely ignored in her books for children.

Historian Diarmaid Ferriter's account of the continued deprivation, neglect and abuse experienced by children as the twentieth century progressed, underlines the disregard for children in Ireland, as many of them were housed in institutions where normal childhood did not exist and consequently, they were subjected to dreadful neglect and ill treatment.[69] Cooney writes of the 'confinement by the courts of thousands of young boys and girls to virtual penal servitude in orphanages where many of them were physically and sexually abused' by members of the religious orders of the Catholic Church.[70] Ferriter points to the irony of the existence of such abuse in a state 'that placed such a premium on the family and the home environment'.[71] The Irish Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*) of 1937 enshrined 'the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law'. The Constitution further aimed to protect the family 'as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State', and guaranteed 'to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children'. The Constitution allowed that:

> in exceptional cases, where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty towards their children, the State as guardian of the common good, by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents, but always with due regard for the natural and imprescriptible rights of the child.[72]

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[69] Ferriter, *Transformation* 391–398; 504–515.
[70] Cooney, *McQuaid* 277.
[71] Ferriter, *Transformation* 391.
[72] "Fundamental Rights, The Family," Article 41, *Constitution of Ireland/Bunreacht na hÉireann* (1 July 1937) 21 Feb. 2010 http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/upload/static/256.htm.

It is an understatement to say that the State failed miserably in its duty to the children of the nation since there was, according to Ferriter, 'no human interest whatsoever in the children'. He adds that, despite the poverty and the 'appalling physical environment in which the vulnerable lived' in the middle years of the century, there was still a respect for tradition and a love of family and place, experienced within the repressive atmosphere created by the dominant Irish Catholic Church.[73]

While the abuse of deprived children continued, there were significant changes from the 1960s onwards with greater prosperity, the advent of free education in 1967 and the abolition of corporal punishment in schools in 1982. Although Dillon began her writing career in 1945, she was writing prolifically from 1959 onwards as this new appreciation of childhood evolved.[74] With a greater emphasis on education, the children of the middle classes had more leisure time, reading was encouraged in schools and the experience of being a child in Ireland had changed radically for the better. Towards the end of Dillon's career in the late 1980s and early 1990s, she witnessed an expansion in book publishing particularly in the area of children's literature which, in itself was indicative of changed attitudes to young people as readers.

The historical literary contextual factors outlined above will be shown throughout this dissertation to be essential considerations in evaluating Dillon's work. Equally, the conceptual framework that underpins this study will prove invaluable in attaining an understanding of the central issues under discussion.

Conceptual Framework

History and Memory

The conceptual framework for this dissertation, while showing awareness of the previously outlined contextual factors, focuses on the notion of both individual and collective memory, and draws on the findings of a number of commentators in the area of memory theory, among them Maurice Halbwachs, David Lowenthal and Pierre Nora. The notion of repeated retrospection within Dillon's work will be critically examined through an understanding of the connection between history and memory as methods of recall, and by focusing on the need for reliability in memory narratives and in historiography. Since Dillon, in her historical fiction, celebrated family and national achievement, the important role of literature, and of the novel in particular, as a mnemonic practice will also be highlighted within this dissertation.

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[73] Ferriter, *Transformation* 393; 391.

[74] For example, Dillon published six children's titles in 1969 alone.
Herron, http://research.dho.ie/dillon/table.html#view=2.

Olick and Robbins, in tracing the lineage of memory studies, look to the ancient Greeks as initiators in the field but attribute its modern incarnation to the work of Hugo Van Hofmannsthal who, in 1902, referred to 'the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us' and to the 'piled up layers of accumulated collective memory'.[75] However, it was French philosopher and sociologist Halbwachs who, beginning with his *Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925, defined the various forms of memory as they are now accepted. Halbwachs identified 'autobiographical', 'individual' or 'personal' memory as events that the individual experiences directly, and 'historical' memory as that which reaches the person only through historical records. Most significantly, he developed more fully the concept of 'collective memory', a group consciousness that exists outside the lives of individuals and to which he sometimes refers as cultural or social memory.[76] Such study has continued to be an area of scholarly interest by theorists Marc Bloch, Émile Durkheim and Lev Vygotsky and reaches into the realms of sociology, psychology and anthropology as well as literature, in which memory is often narrated.

Memory, the way by which humans, whether independently as individuals or collectively as families, groups or nations, call to mind past experiences and emotions, can also be a means of establishing identities. Huyssen, quoted by Olick and Robbins, defines these identities as 'the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past'. Memory also allows the person or group to place themselves along a continuum of existence from an ancient past into the present and with projection into the future. Olick and Robbins explain: 'Memory is a central, if not the central medium through which identities are constituted and maintained'.[77] Through memory, people come to an understanding of who they are and where they have come from, and can derive meaning for current situations and create plans for the future. Halbwachs sees individual memory as inevitably linked to the collective, since it is within social groups, the family in particular, where memories are formed and developed. He believes that it is impossible for individuals to remember in a coherent way without the suggestions of the groups to which they belong and the cues that prompt their ability to recall. He writes: 'It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories'.[78]

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[75] Jeffrey K. Olick & Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): 105–140, 18 July 2010 http://www.jstor.org/stable/223476.

[76] Maurice Halbwachs & Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (1st ed. 1925) This ed. Ser. Heritage of Sociology Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Zerubavel sees early recollections as 'only reinterpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family'. Within what he describes as 'mnemonic communities', individuals identify with the past of their family, their society or nation, in a form of 'sociobiographical memory' through which they feel pride, pain or shame with regard to events that happened even long before they were born.[79] This observation is particularly significant in Dillon's case since her history, as stated, is linked to contentious historical events. While connection to the past and to the formation of a future is relevant to individuals, it is equally true for the culture as a whole. Stephen Bertman provides a suitable analogy: 'A culture is like a tree – its leaves and branches reaching skyward toward the future, its trunk fixed solidly in the present, its roots drawing nourishment from a subterranean past'.[80]

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[77] Olick & Robbins 122; 133.

[78] Halbwachs & Coser 38.

[79] Eviatar Zerubavel, "Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past," *Qualitative Sociology*, 19.3 (1996) 284; 290, 5 Mar. 2011 http://www.sfu.ca/medialab/archive/2007/487/Resources/Readings/Zerubavel1996.pdf.

[80] Stephen Bertman, *Cultural amnesia: America's future and the crisis of memory* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000) 15.

Remembrance of the past by individuals within groups can effect healing or can induce pain. It can allow deeper understanding of the consequences of actions in all spheres of life. It can also evoke pride in images of a homeland or of ancestry. Alternatively, it can cause psychological disturbance when tragedy, atrocity or injustice are recalled, leading to feelings of confusion, grievance, hatred and revenge. Whatever the consequences, memory has the ability to inform the community, whereas its absence can leave it culturally, or even intellectually, adrift. Bertman upholds the view of historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr who emphasises the value of memory to the nation as follows:

> An individual deprived of memory becomes disoriented and lost, not knowing where he has been or where he is going, so a nation denied a conception of its past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future.[81]

The study of memory is generally undertaken alongside the discipline of history, and theorists clarify the links and distinctions between the two. Anderson underlines that nations are not merely born of the present but that they 'always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future'.[82] While the future is largely unknown, even the past is not fixed, since 'both narratives of events and the meanings given to them are in a constant state of transformation'.[83] Past events are recalled through memory and recorded in historiography, and Dillon engages in both, through family recall and historical narrative within her fiction. Attention will be drawn to the interrelation and even interdependence between history and memory within Dillon's historical fiction, as she addresses the individual or collective memories of the family and the nation, and the previously recorded history of that nation.

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[81] Bertman vi.
[82] Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 11.
[83] Katharine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone, *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006) 23.

Reliability of History and Memory

If the past is not a fixed constant for Dillon, neither is memory. It is transformed over time and contextualised against the ever-changing present. Recollection of events can be distorted depending on the person or groups engaged in remembering, their current circumstances and the distance in time or place from the original incident. Although Halbwachs believes that the passing on of stories through successive generations is important and even regenerative, he also concedes that it can be problematic. This dissertation will question the arbitrariness of the 'truths' selected by Dillon for transmission, their subjective nature and the possibility of deliberate or unconscious exclusion of disturbing facts. Halbwachs contends that society often suggests to people not only to recount events of their lives but also 'to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them' so that these memories are given 'a prestige that reality did not possess'.[84] They become more complicated by retellings and, as Hodgkin and Radstone point out, the 'process of transmission changes the rememberers too'. They explain that those who share their memories find that, unwittingly, their memories change: 'What emerges is a sense of sliding, elusive truths, which change shape and meaning as decades advance, as children take up and share and examine and revisit parental memories'.[85] This process of revision is central to Dillon's fiction. At a remove of at least one generation from the events that she recounts, she relies on the narratives of relatives who may have consciously or unconsciously amended their accounts with the passage of time. She may also have been privy to only one side of a particular story, namely that of her family, at the expense of a more objective viewpoint. Halbwachs posits that events or emotions, remembered subjectively, inevitably lose in the telling and, in the light of changes in attitude and perspective, fail to retain retrospectively their original meaning. His view, summarised by Coser his translator, is that the past is intimately linked to the present in that 'our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present'.[86] This is true for Eilís Dillon's use of memory since, with the benefit of hindsight, she could depict historical events such as the 1916 Rising in a flattering light, secure in the knowledge that political developments had validated the episodes from the past.

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[84] Halbwachs & Coser 51.
[85] Hodgkin & Radstone 27.

Dillon was fortunate in being surrounded by those who had participated in the significant events that she describes and who could provide her with a wealth of personal memories. Through family anecdote she was supplied with a continuous source of recollection, which Halbwachs sees as the prop that is essential to the maintenance of memory.[87] In the absence of such supports, as people pass away and as generations become more removed in time from the original events, memories are subsumed and documented in historiography by independent, though not necessarily objective, others. Dillon, in absorbing family recollections, preserved them in her fiction in a separate, more colourful and more embellished format than that employed in historical narrative. When incidents become removed and threatened with oblivion by an ever-changing present, historical narrative supercedes the sort of collective memory that is often used in literature. This is in keeping with Halbwachs' view of history as 'dead memory, a way of preserving a past to which we no longer have an "organic" experiential relation'.[88] As memory fades or becomes selective, and subsequent generations are more removed in time from the action, history, by using a variety of accounts and records, fills the ensuing vacuum and rescues what might otherwise become extinct in memory. It also, through its continuous publications in various media, decides and prescribes what will be remembered within a culture or a nation. As Jewish historian Josef Yerushalami explains: 'Certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection, which the historian, uninvited, disturbs and reverses'.[89]

History, in contrast to memory, projects an expectation of objectivity and reliability in selecting what to recount and how it should be recounted. Pierre Nora posits a contradictory view however, suggesting that memory has authenticity in that it lives in the mind of the rememberer and can be recounted directly, whereas history 'is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer' and is shaped by current ideologies and circumstance. He believes that 'history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it'.[90] Debate continues about the trustworthiness of both in chronicling the past but it is clear that neither can work independently. Memory can be clarified, renewed or enhanced through history's interpretations and its provision of added knowledge from newly discovered sources, its more nuanced questioning and its revisionist approaches. Yet in doing this, history also relies on individual and collective memory as a crucial source that can breathe life and personality into its accounts.

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[86] Halbwachs & Coser 34.
[87] Halbwachs & Coser 34.
[88] Olick & Robbins 110.
[89] in Olick & Robbins 110.

Eilís Dillon makes extensive use of family memory in her work and draws especially on material from her mother's narrative that became a posthumously published memoir, *All in the Blood*.[91] While careful also to incorporate historical accounts to verify facts, Dillon's memories of childhood, supplemented with family anecdotes, provide colour and authenticity to her writing. As writer and politician Martin Mansergh points out, for the recipient of reminiscence, memory can be notoriously unreliable and open to manipulation, especially when individual reputations are at stake. He states: 'personal memory can be weak, particularly when old men face accusations arising from their past'.[92] Dillon, removed by only one generation from turbulent political events, was nurtured on the combined family experiences and on the conflicted feelings and motivations of the participants. In the absence of a reliable historical narrative or when there is a cultural silence surrounding an event, it is often the second generation that takes on the responsibility of the role of narrator. These descendants, receiving the memories of a major event are, as Nora identifies, often haunted by memories which are not quite their own.[93] They take on these second- or third-hand memories and recycle them as their own, becoming 're-rememberers' or 're-narrators of heard stories'.[94] This study examines Dillon's role as rememberer or re-rememberer, with her reliance on received memories and internalised stories set against the background of what is perhaps more objective, less biased and more nuanced established historical narrative.

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[90] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, Spring 1989 (California: University of California Press) 8; 9.
[91] Plunkett Dillon, *All in the Blood* (2006).
[92] Martin Mansergh, *The Legacy of History for Making Peace in Ireland: Lectures and Commemorative Addresses* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2003) 15.
[93] Nora 8.

Commemoration, Remembering and Forgetting

Historical memory is generally maintained through commemorative experiences that preserve past events in the nation's consciousness. Dillon adopted literature as the most appropriate form for the commemoration of family and historical events. Through her commemorative literature, she engages in the mnemonic practices and forms encouraged by Pierre Nora who emphasised the need for the creation of '*lieux de mémoire*' or sites of memory as reminders of the past. These sites are important in the absence of '*milieux de mémoire*'; the real and disappeared environments of memory that are discarded through negligence or amnesia.[95] Apart from commemorative sites, there are numerous other ways through which societies celebrate their past, including: anniversaries, monuments, naming of architectural structures, museums, archives, digital collections, coinage and postage stamps. While Durkheim identified celebratory aspects of mnemonic rituals as arising from 'collective effervescence',[96] Halbwachs' view of collective memory as surviving in more routine forms of commemoration, exemplified in family reminiscences as accumulations of individual memory, is most relevant to the study of Dillon.[97]

Yet still the question arises about the purpose of commemoration and its various expressions. Public displays signify, in Fredric Jameson's view, 'an anxiety about the loss of bearings and about the speed and extent of change'. In other words, looking to the past gives 'a surrogate architecture of continuity'.[98] This revisitation of 'the past as a field of meaning' solidifies identity and allows for a 'returning home, revisiting the origins, reopening the history that produced the contemporary world'.[99] In the Irish context, Mansergh, recognising commemoration as 'a reflection and marker at any given time of our sense of identity', points to its benefits in making sense of contemporary experience, and in helping new generations to seek courage, confidence and inspiration, all facets of Dillon's work. In Mansergh's view, commemoration enables them 'to honour that which was noble; to acknowledge and try to correct what went wrong', while also helping 'to transcend the conflicts of the past, as we try to construct a future hoped for by many of our ancestors but which was denied them'.[100]

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[94] Hodgkin & Radstone 25.

[95] Nora 7.

[96] Émile Durkheim in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) identified collective effervescence as high energy levels, a collective emotion within a gathering of people, e.g. such as, creating a carnival-like atmosphere.

[97] Halbwachs & Coser 83.

[98] Fredric Jameson & Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 149–150.

However, it is often the absence of memory that enables such transcendence since, as Didier Maleuvre states, 'the real basis of historical remembrance is not what is remembered but what is left unremembered'.[101] Renan, with a similar dual perspective, also articulates the importance of forgetting not only as a prime civic duty but even as an obligation:

> *Or, l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien de choses.* (The essence of a nation is that all its individuals have many things in common and also that they have all forgotten many things.)[102]

Such cultural amnesia is deemed essential for a nation in dealing with new social and political priorities since obsessing on past misdeeds can impede progress.[103] The Irish people, in an effort to recover from the bitterness of the Civil War, engaged in a form of public amnesia and accepted silence. This is not an unusual response and is replicated in other societies[104] through 'general silencing of debate on the subject in subsequent decades' and an aura of 'persistent bitterness'. The ensuing 'rhetoric of silence and amnesia in the name of national unity' tends to give way over time to an acceptance of the need to tell the stories concerning the event.[105] Writers, through narration of the past, can contribute to a healing process that can lead to national reconciliation or can also be complicit in ensuring continued amnesia. Eilís Dillon, in an overt merging of history and memory, used literature as a form of commemoration and to represent her views on conciliation and rapprochement suited to the emerging Irish State. Equally, her choice of subject matter and her emphasis of certain historical events exhibits elements of both memory and forgetting. Dillon's approach to her writing for children and adults will be highlighted in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

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[99] Jameson et al. 150.

[100] Mansergh 14; 16; 17.

[101] Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories, History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 59.

[102] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" Becoming National: A Reader, eds. Geoff Eley & Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 42-56.

[103] According to Immanuel Velikovsky's theory of cultural amnesia, 'mankind forgot about unpleasant catastrophic events on the conscious level, but remembers them on the unconscious level'.
ER Milton, Foreword, "Recollections of a Fallen Sky," (University of Leithbridge, May 1974) 9 June 2010 http://www.grazian-archive.com/quantavolution/QUANTAVOL/rfs_docs/rfs_1.pdf.

Literature as Commemoration

By using literature as commemoration, Dillon was following in an ancient tradition of linking memory and story first through oral recollection, then through written manuscripts, print technology, and more recently through modern digital media. Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, the tale of an adventurous journey, is the quintessential work of memory, in which the protagonists, wandering after the fall of Troy, are motivated by a desire to see their homeland again. As Bertman points out, 'through recollection and determination [...] the scattered fragments of a shattered world could be found and once again mended into wholeness'.[106] In modern literature, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which borrows its title from Homer's character, was also written at a distance from its setting and is a remarkable work of detailed recall of the geography of Joyce's native Dublin. Such examples point to the fact that remembrance is central to finding that important personal and cultural connection often linked with home.

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[104] Finland's experience following its Civil War of 1920 is explained by Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen in "Memories and Histories Public and Private After the Finnish Civil War," in Hodgkin & Radstone.

[105] Hodgkin & Radstone 25.

[106] Bertman 3.

Literature can sometimes be viewed as preferable to historical reporting since, through the mixing of fact and fiction, it can broaden discussion of the past. It has the potential 'to spark alternative thoughts and sensibilities and to offer a reflection on the human condition'. It can portray '*das Wesentliche* (the essence) of life's experience that transcends daily reality and carries universal truth'.[107] Most importantly, literature has what Anna Seghers describes as the 'capacity to pierce silence' at such times when historians fail to do so.[108] This dissertation, adopting the framework of the problematic interrelationship of memory, history and commemoration, looks at just how successful Dillon was in using her literary voice to portray the objective truth of national history, viewed through the subjective prism of family memory.

Methodological Approach

Primary Sources

Careful and repeated reading of Dillon's extensive body of writing was undertaken as an essential feature of this thesis as a means of identifying the writer's underlying philosophy and approach to her work as a writer for children and adults.

Eilís Dillon's considerable output of books for children is categorised on the official Dillon website according to the age groups of her intended readership, and this categorisation is adhered to throughout this dissertation.[109] Books are treated in three sections: those for young children, those for eight to twelve year olds and books for teenagers, a total of thirty-seven titles. Since it is impossible to discuss all of these works in depth within the confines of this study, certain texts within each category are chosen as representative of Dillon's work for young people and are discussed in some detail in Chapters Two and Three. The works chosen are examined in terms of language, characterisation, setting, plot and themes, but in particular they serve to provide evidence of Dillon's sense of retrospection and reliance on memory. Although Dillon's books were translated into sixteen languages, this study only briefly makes reference to the author's international publications. Many of the texts were accompanied by illustrations but it has not been within the remit of this thesis to assess the contributions of the illustrators involved. Details of all editions and translations, as well as names of illustrators, are accessible on the website that accompanies Volume II of this dissertation.[110]

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[107] Birgit Maier-Katlin, *Silence and Acts of Memory: A Postwar Discourse on Literature, History, Anna Seghers and Women in the Third Reich* (Mass: Rosemont Publishing, 2007) 19.
[108] Maier-Katlin 19.
[109] Dillon Writing, http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.

Dillon is still probably best known as a writer for children, but she also gained an international reputation as a writer for adults in a variety of genres. She attached great importance to her adult novels and believed that they provided her with credibility and status as a writer. In her view, these books added substance to the corpus of her work and allowed her an otherwise unavailable acceptance in the world of letters, while also affording her the opportunity to expand on the themes addressed in a more limited way in her books for children. In writing for both audiences, Dillon demonstrated versatility, diligence and a desire for excellence. Given the critical attention received by these adult novels, it is appropriate that they are included for considerable analysis within this study and examined for thematic links, evidence of Dillon's underlying philosophy to writing and the extensive use of retrospection in her writing.

For the purpose of this thesis, Dillon's adult fiction, treated in Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation, is categorised into three genres as recommended by the writer's son Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin. While there is some overlap in tone, they can, in his view, be described in the following way: detective or crime novels of which there are three, literary or 'psychological' novels of which there are two, and six historical novels.[111] They are treated according to genre and in chronological order with one exception. *The Bitter Glass,* a novel about the Irish Civil War, was written at an early stage in Dillon's career but due to its subject matter is treated alongside her other historical novels which were not written until almost twenty years later.

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[110] Herron, http://research.dho.ie/dillon/.

[111] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 4 Apr. 2010 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors/dillon.html.

Dillon's writing in other genres, namely poetry, short stories and drama, in addition to her work as editor and translator, will also be considered throughout the dissertation. Although the main focus is on Dillon's published work, reference will be made to some unpublished material as evidence of her ability to diversify and to experiment with form. Titles of her published works appear on the aforementioned website and are also cited as primary sources in the Bibliography for this dissertation.[112] Dillon's unpublished work exists in draft and unfinished form in her manuscript collection in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

Other primary source material, available in two collections of manuscripts, proved invaluable in providing detailed information relating to Dillon's writing. The Eilís Dillon Papers, Collection Number 41 in The National Library of Ireland (NLI) Manuscript Section, includes drafts of her texts, business correspondence, notes for lectures which Dillon delivered at conferences in Ireland and abroad, and reviews of her work from national and international newspapers, magazines and newsletters, all of which added substantially to the knowledge base for this thesis. In addition, The Dillon Family Archive (DFA) housed at 16, Prince Edward Terrace, Blackrock, County Dublin, has also permitted access to documentation relevant to this study.

Dillon's autobiographical work *Inside Ireland,* although categorised as a travel book, provided useful biographical material as did *All in the Blood,* the personal memoir of her mother, Geraldine Plunkett Dillon.

Interviews

In order to acquire insight into Eilís Dillon's personality and her work, six interviews were conducted with Dillon's family members, friends and colleagues. Interviewees were chosen for their differing individual connections with the late writer and their ability to provide unique insights into her life, work and contribution to literature. Those interviewed were: Dillon's son, Professor Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, her daughter the poet Professor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin; publisher Michael O'Brien; Jack Harte, Director of The Irish Writers' Centre; children's literature critic Robert Dunbar; and Dillon's friend, Professor Declan Kiberd, Chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama, University College Dublin.

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[112] Herron, http://research.dho.ie/dillon/.

Correct and ethical procedures were followed in conducting the interviews. Interviewees were contacted either by email or letter and were provided with an outline of this PhD thesis and a request for their participation. They were also given the broad parameters of a possible discussion, and advance permission was sought for digital recording and for the subsequent transcription of the interviews for the purposes of research. Interviewees responded promptly and were eager to participate. Arrangements were made in each case to meet at a venue and time of their choosing. The interviews took place at various dates, over a period of a year in accordance with the availability of the participants. Eilís Dillon's son Cormac and daughter Eiléan opted to be interviewed together.

The purpose of the interviews was clearly defined. It was hoped that in the interests of this research, they would result in greater clarity regarding the work of Eilís Dillon, would provide insights into the author's mindset, verify some of this researcher's perceptions and possibly present further research opportunities. While suitable questions had been formulated in advance, there was in-built flexibility to adapt them as necessary if the interviewee expanded or showed interest in pursuing a point in greater detail. In conducting the interviews, sensitivity was shown to the interviewees with regard to their close relationships to Eilís Dillon and the personal nature of their reminiscences. It was also necessary to listen attentively, respond appropriately and provide an atmosphere conducive to the conversation. At the same time, it was important not to impose this researcher's personal views and to maintain openness to the opinions of those being questioned. The interviewees entered into the process with great willingness and were in all cases, helpful, forthright, informative and entertaining in communicating their opinions and memories. The interviews were digitally recorded as arranged and subsequently transcribed. They can be made available in print or on CD as requested.

Secondary Sources

Following extensive reading, a range of secondary sources has been chosen as being of particular relevance to this thesis. Books and journals, both print and online, relating in particular to the theory of memory, literary criticism, biography and history have been consulted and cited within this dissertation, and have proved crucial in providing a critical framework within which Dillon's work could be examined. All secondary sources are suitably listed in the complete bibliography that accompanies this dissertation.

In the absence of bibliographic material relating specifically to Dillon's work, a number of newspaper articles and reviews have been quoted within this dissertation. Reviews by their nature are personal viewpoints, written in particular contexts and as Ó Cuilleanáin explains can be 'favourable', 'hostile' or indeed 'political' but are nonetheless valuable in providing an insight into the ways in which Dillon's contemporaries viewed her work. Full referencing information is given where possible. In a few cases, the articles deemed worthy of inclusion were taken from news clippings found among Dillon's papers, specifically in documents NLI MSs 33338-44, and some details such as newspaper page numbers were not available. The media archive of *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* was consulted and several television programmes were viewed.[113] These were invaluable in forming a personal impression of Eilís Dillon and her approach to her work. *The Irish Times* and *Irish Newspapers* online archives were also consulted.[114] Disappointingly, while there is some material relating to Dillon in the archive of publishers Faber & Faber, London, their records are currently being catalogued and are therefore unavailable to researchers, and will remain so for some years.[115]

Conventions and Clarifications

This dissertation has followed the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (2009), as recommended by the English Department at St

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[113] *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* archive, http://www.rte.ie/laweb/.
[114] Irish Times Archive, http://www.irishtimes.com/archive/; Irish Newspapers Archive, http://www.irishnewsarchive.com/.
[115] Personal email received from Faber & Faber, 14 Jan. 2011. See Appendix D.

Patrick's College, with several modifications.[116] Page numbers are located centrally at the bottom of the page and the chapter number is included in the right-hand header for convenience. Footnotes are used throughout for both citation and added commentary when necessary.

When successive quotations from a single source are used, a combined reference is given showing the page numbers in order of their appearance, e.g.: Dillon, 36; 45; 19. In the interests of clarity, clustering will occur only within paragraphs. When a source is cited for the first time, it will be given a full first-note reference and will be included in the Bibliography, together with the relevant edition where potential ambiguities occur. In subsequent references, in the same or later chapters, a shortened form is used with the author's surname and page number. In the case of several books by the same author, a similar shortened version of the title is used. In order to follow the chronology of Dillon's works, publication dates are provided in brackets, with full citation given in the footnotes and Bibliography.

Dillon's manuscripts are identified by the document number and by the title, where one exists. Unfortunately these manuscripts are not dated. However, in a few cases, by cross-referencing with other source material, it has been possible to determine a specific date.

In the interests of clarity of their sequence, Dillon's publications for children and adults are referenced in the bibliography in chronological order and with their original publication details. Since many of originals are out of print and not easily available, it was necessary to access subsequent editions from specialist booksellers for use in the course of this study. These publications are cited in full in the footnotes. Online references cited throughout were correct at the date of thesis submission.

Throughout this dissertation, the writer is referred to as Eilís Dillon or Dillon. Occasionally, reviewers allude to her as Mrs Ó Cuilleanáin. She is referred to only in her obituary as Eilís Dillon-Mercier. To avoid confusion, Dillon's mother is referred to as Geraldine Plunkett or Geraldine, and Dillon's grandmother as 'the Countess'. Dillon's first husband will be identified as Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin Senior, where necessary, to differentiate him from their son who shares the same name.

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[116] *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edn. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009).

On becoming a writer, John Francis Whelan translated his name into Irish causing 'editors, typesetter, critics and publishers to struggle with the spelling'. The version the writer himself is alleged to have preferred was a curious hybrid of the Irish and English forms. In line with his wishes, he is referred to this thesis in the 'standardized form', Seán O'Faoláin, with an apostrophe instead of the more usual Irish accent (*fada*) on the letter O.[117]

When writing about Dillon in a historical sense, the past tense is generally used in the narrative of this dissertation. However, in describing her writing style and in quoting from her work and that of others, the present tense is used, since the writing retains an ongoing existence. American spelling appears only if it is used in an original text as quoted. As many of the copies of Dillon's novels were American editions, this regularly applies. Otherwise British spelling is adhered to throughout this dissertation.

Since it was the convention until relatively recently to use the pronoun 'he' as Dillon and other writers did, when referring in a general way to the child, the writer or the reader, this traditional usage appears in some quotations. The term [*sic*] has generally been avoided in the dissertation, as the number of instances could have made its presence intrusive in the text.

Approaching this Dissertation

Mary Leland, writing in 1984 of Dillon's 'various skills, literary status and long list of worthwhile publications', remarked that 'the time surely is long overdue for a major critical assessment of this major writer'.[118] However significant this thesis may prove to be, it has not been possible within its parameters to undertake research into some areas that deserve greater attention. Given the wealth of archival material available, future researchers may consider it beneficial to undertake comparative and textual analysis of Dillon's work, assessment of various translations of her novels and of the accompanying illustrations and book covers. It is hoped nonetheless that this thesis, completed decades after Leland's call for a critical assessment, will be considered as the beginning of an adequate appraisal of Dillon's literary contribution by opening up opportunities for further research into her work.

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[117] Frank Shovlin, "The Struggle for Form, Seán O'Faoláin's Autobiographies," *Irish Writing Since 1950, The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35 (2005) 163.

[118] Mary Leland, "Where Four Worlds Meet," *Irish Press* [Dublin] 21 July 1984.

The introduction to this thesis began by emphasising the importance that Sainte-Beuve attached to the personal attributes of the artist in forming an assessment of his work. This study maintains an awareness of Dillon's life as it influenced her writing and, with this in mind, addresses many facets of her character. Chapter One will embark on this process with an exploration of the formative influences that were central to Dillon's development as a writer, while succeeding chapters will elaborate on how these factors related to her publications for both children and adults, during a long and prolific writing career.

Chapter One

Family and Other Formative Influences

Introduction

Eilís Dillon, in her autobiographical work *Inside Ireland* writes, 'I was born in 1920 into a world of ghosts', a reference to the ancestors of whom she was immensely proud.[1] She elaborates on the family's achievements at some length, making links to various Plunketts and Dillons, some who in recent history had placed their lives in danger, or even lost their lives, in the pursuit of national independence. She explains that memories of their exploits had been transmitted to her from an early age: 'Throughout my childhood, reminiscences and anecdotes built up in my mind some picture of how it was to be alive and present during that extraordinary period in Ireland'.[2]

The significant involvement of close family members in the bid for Ireland's freedom meant that Eilís Dillon became immersed in the history of the major events of the early twentieth century and, through family recollection, in the stories of earlier historical events. This chapter highlights the importance of these memories for Dillon and also provides an examination of the other forces that contributed to her formation as a writer and framed her philosophy of writing. These include the writer's family background, family relationships, her education and reading, as well as the Irish literary figures who formed a major influence on her thinking, in particular WB Yeats as a source of inspiration and Seán O'Faoláin as a teacher and mentor. Just how extensively all of these factors impacted on Eilís Dillon, either in propelling her forward in her writing career or in constraining her style of writing will be examined extensively in this chapter and referred to throughout this dissertation.

The Plunkett/Dillon family background explains Dillon's fascination with the past and her desire that others should understand it as she did. An outline of her lineage also serves to illustrate how knowledge of ancestry influenced her choices of genre, the writing style she adopted and her extensive reliance on family history as she sought success as a writer. Poet, Thomas Kinsella, summarises the usefulness of the writer's heritage in the search for literary identity in the belief that 'if he can find no means in his inheritance to suit him, he will have to start from scratch'.[3] Eilís Dillon had no shortage of personages or events from her family past on which to draw for the creation of her literary identity. On the contrary, far from 'starting from scratch', Dillon was well informed of their various successes in a number of spheres. The shadow of her ancestors was such a formative and relevant element within her life and work that substantial information regarding their status within Irish society is provided here.

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[1] Eilís Dillon, *Inside Ireland* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) 73.

[2] Dillon, *Inside* 62.

Memory of Ancestry

As a child, Eilís Dillon came to recognise the names of some of her bilateral forebears in her school history texts and writes of her amazement at discovering that among them there was 'one hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn[4], many imprisoned and exiled for rebelling against the Crown, and another executed by firing squad for the same crime' only four years before she was born.[5] She explains that both families had arrived with the twelfth century Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, although with some suggestion that the Plunketts, possibly of Danish origin, had arrived even earlier.[6] These newly arrived families acquired land and, on settling well into Irish life, were destined to play their part in the course of Irish history. With their political and cultural heritage, laws, architecture and religious reforms, they brought positive change to Ireland.[7] Toby Barnard has identified 'the cults and cultures of improvement' that functioned from Norman times but were developed by colonists from the 1530s onwards and functioned almost as 'a creed' within the Ascendancy class in Ireland. The efforts to improve conditions and to encourage the indigenous population, largely seen as backward in their ways, 'to adopt habits conducive to civility and prosperity' were undertaken by some with a sense of superiority and by the more sincere, with a form of practical patriotism.[8]

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[3] Thomas Kinsella, "The Irish Writer," in *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson Tradition & The Irish Writer*, eds. Thomas Kinsella and WB Yeats (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970) 66.

[4] Archbishop Oliver Plunkett (1629–1681) was executed in 1681 for treason. He was canonised as a Catholic saint in 1975.

[5] Dillon, *Inside* 7. This is a reference to Joseph Mary Plunkett, poet and mystic, one of the signatories of the Irish Proclamation in 1916 and one of the main military strategists for the Rising.

[6] Dillon, *Inside* 7.

[7] Anne Chambers, *At Arm's Length: Aristocrats in the Republic of Ireland* (New York: New Island Books, 2004) 21.

The Plunketts and the Dillons, in individual displays of patriotism, played a significant part in the development of the country up to modern times, a contribution of which Eilís Dillon was enormously proud. Benedict Kiely justified Dillon's pride in her ancestors stating that 'they had served Ireland honourably for a long time and kept verve and style right up to the present'.[9]

The Plunkett Family

Describing the Plunkett beginnings, Countess Elizabeth of Fingall (1866–1944), wife of Arthur James Francis Plunkett, 11th Earl of Fingall, states that even Debrett[10] was beaten by the family antiquity, since it describes the family's settlement in Ireland as 'so remote that nothing can be ascertained as to the precise period'.[11] However, it is generally accepted that, throughout the centuries, the Plunketts played leading roles 'in local farming and social scenes, with a distinguished record of services in Ireland and abroad, both in the secular and religious fields'.[12] The Plunketts of County Meath, future Earls of Fingall and Barons of Dunsany, 'settled on rich Irish land and prospered early'[13] and, like other foreigners, were 'culturally seduced and assimilated through inter-marriage and social contact with the native Irish, becoming '*ispis Hibernicis Hiberniores*', (more Irish than the Irish themselves).[14] The Plunkett castles at Killeen and Dunsany date back to between 1180 and 1200, and were passed in marriage in the fifteenth century to Sir Christopher Plunkett, first Earl of Fingall, from whom the Fingall and Dunsany Plunkett lines issued.[15] By the end of the sixteenth century, 'the manuscript of the Gentry of Meath' recorded the existence of fifteen Plunketts 'all estated men and all relatives',[16] who were firmly established as part of a class that, for centuries, remained 'at the social apex of a landed community in Meath'.[17] During the 1700s, a Protestant Ascendancy was created in Ireland through the implementation of the Penal Laws, which aimed to diminish the power of the Catholic religion 'by making it a barrier to the achievement of land, wealth and political power'.[18] The replacement of inheritance according to the principle of primogeniture with a system of *gavelkind*, whereby Catholic lands had to be divided equally among all sons of the landowner, ensured that the size and influence of Catholic landed estates were greatly reduced.[19] In an effort to maintain their wealth and status, many of the Catholic gentry, among them, the Dunsany Plunketts, reluctantly converted to the Protestant religion and were, by implication, expected to support the British parliament. A few, including the Fingall branch of the Plunkett family in Killeen, from which Eilís Dillon is descended, formed a minority of the landed families who remained Catholic.

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[8] Toby Barnard, *Improving Ireland? Projectors, Prophets and Profiteers 1641–1786* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008) 13–5.

[9] Benedict Kiely, "Between the Dillons and the Plunketts," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 17 July 1982.

[10] Debrett's *Peerage and Baronetage* – a guide to the genealogy of British Aristocracy.

[11] Elizabeth Countess of Fingall, *Seventy Years Young: Memories of Elizabeth Countess of Fingall (told to Pamela Hinkson)* (1st ed. 1937) This ed. (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991) 100.

[12] Maurice Colbert, *A Life of Sir Horace Plunkett: Visionary and Pioneer, Social Reformer and Humanitarian* (Naas: Author published, 2009) 25.

[13] Plunkett Dillon, *All in the Blood* 1.

[14] Chambers 23.

[15] Sir Christopher's son, a Catholic, joined the 1641 Rebellion and died a prisoner in Dublin Castle, in Thomas & Valerie Packenham, eds. *A Traveller's Companion to Dublin* (London: Robinson, 2003)

Terence Dooley explains that due to wealth derived from agricultural rents, their social standing, cultural upbringing, and local and national political power, these and other landlords of Meath distanced themselves from the vast majority of the people. The political sympathies of those who were Catholic lay with their fellow Protestant landlords rather than with their Catholic tenantry. The high walls that surrounded their large houses symbolised the restricted contact that they had with the local people, apart from their servants. However, the aforementioned Countess of Fingall professed to be pleased with the fact that her home, unlike that of others, was free of walls 'keeping Ireland and the people outside'.[20] Yet, as Dooley points out, regardless of how apparently open the house was, being buffered by stewards and a large staff, the Countess of Fingall probably remained aloof from, and ignorant of, the plight of the wider community.[21]

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[16] Fingall, *Seventy* 101.

[17] Terance Dooley, "A World Turned Upside Down – A study of the changing social world of the landed nobility of County Meath, 1875–1945," Ríocht na Midhe, 12 (2001): 188–228, 189. In the 1870s, the Earl of Fingall owned 9,600 acres and Lord Dunsany 4,400 acres, 8 Jan. 2011 http://eprints.nuim.ie/771/1/county_meath.pdf.

[18] Chambers 42.

[19] "Gavelkind," *Webster's Online Dictionary*, 1 Mar. 2011 http://www.websters-dictionary-online.org/definitions/.

[20] Fingall, *Seventy* 114.

[21] Dooley, "A World Turned Upside Down," 8 Jan. 2011 http://eprints.nuim.ie/771/1/county_meath.pdf.

The important part played by members of this class throughout Ireland's history has been well documented. It is purported that 'in every development that had occurred in the prolonged and bitter evolution towards Irish self-rule, individual members of the Ascendancy had played a part'.[22] Successive generations of politically-aware Plunketts, both Protestant and Catholic, demonstrated the capacity to understand the two sides of the religious and political divide and, while generally loyal to the Crown, had deep and persistent affiliations to the land of Ireland. In her adult novels Dillon continually refers to this Anglo-Norman family background with an inherited sense of the French concept of *civilité* that the conquering forces brought to the Gaelic world. In some of her work, conscious of her history, she demonstrates her facility with the modern equivalent of all four of the languages used in Ireland by this class up to the end of the sixteenth century, namely Irish, Norman-French, Latin and English.[23]

This sense of enlightenment culminated in the family's support for Ireland's future development and in the drive towards cultural and economic reform in the early part of the twentieth century. Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett (1854–1932), younger brother of writer Lord Dunsany,[24] and a first cousin of Eilís Dillon's grandfather, was a central figure in this process and one to whom Dillon regularly refers and echoes in her writing. Sir Horace made his mark as a politician and agrarian reformer and established, in a concession from the British Parliament, a Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1900, specifically for Ireland. He founded the innovative Agricultural Co-Operative Movement, which he saw as 'the key to the future stability and wellbeing of Ireland'.[25] Plunkett, whose motto was 'Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living', was also a key influence in the founding of The United Irishwomen's Association in 1910, a precursor to the Irish Countrywomen's Association, which remains successful to this day. In the political sphere, Plunkett was regarded as one of 'the leading Irish moderates in that critical era between the fall of Parnell and the polarization of Irish politics during the first decade of the twentieth century' and among the prime movers to find an inclusive, peaceful, all-Ireland solution that would include Ulster, chairing

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[22] Chambers 124.

[23] Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986) 15.

[24] Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, eighteenth Baron Dunsany.

[25] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 8 Jan. 2011 http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/index.html.

The Irish Convention of 1917 with this aim.[26] In 1923, five years after a period of internment for his part in the republican cause, he became a senator in *Seanad Éireann.*

In straddling the Catholic-Protestant divide, Horace Plunkett demonstrated great foresight with his broad-minded approach but suffered distressing consequences, enduring the opprobrium of both sides of the political divide. He was despised by members of his own class for his development of nationalist affiliations and, as a result, was driven by unionists from his parliamentary seat in 1900. He was equally criticised by nationalists for diverting energy away from political independence towards social and agrarian reform.[27] His house in Kilteragh, County Dublin, like those of many other landowners, was targeted by militant republicans and was later set on fire in 1923 with the loss of many valuable documents and works of art.[28] The event symbolised the end of an era since, as the Countess of Fingall describes, there was no possibility of retrieving the vibrant cultural life represented in that house that now 'lay buried under those ruins and ashes'.[29] Eilís Dillon demonstrates her admiration for Horace Plunkett and his ideals, mirroring his belief in the concept of '*noblesse oblige*' in much of her work. Plunkett, aware of the responsibilities accruing to 'an intellectually gifted' landlord class, had urged them as the 'resident gentry', despite previous acrimony with their tenants, 'to fulfil the functions of an aristocracy' within rural communities, since they had 'by their wealth and education special advantages' which they could use for 'the common good'.[30] Dillon regularly mentions Plunkett in an incidental way in her novels as an example of a moderate Anglo-Irishman who was also an innovative force in Ireland, supporting his view that 'there is no better country for an Irishman to live in or to work for, than his own'.[31]

Dillon's great-grandfather, Patrick Plunkett, one of a family of fourteen, came to Dublin from Killeen, Co. Meath, in 1844. In partnership with his cousin Patrick Cranny, he developed properties in the fashionable suburbs of Ballsbridge,

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[26] Trevor West, Introduction, *Seventy Years Young: Memories of Elizabeth Countess of Fingall (told to Pamela Hinkson*, by Elizabeth Countess of Fingall (1st ed. 1937) This ed. (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991) 4.
[27] West in Fingall 5.
[28] Fingall, *Seventy* 418-9.
[29] Fingall 425.
[30] Sir Horace Plunkett, *Noblesse Oblige, An Irish Rendering* (London: Maunsel 1908) 10; 25; 26.
[31] Horace Plunkett 5; Dillon, 33328, "Coming Home to Dublin".

Rathmines and Donnybrook and amassed a great deal of wealth as a result.[32] Consistent with the need for Catholic families in the mid-nineteenth century to establish themselves within the business and upper middle classes of their generation, both men also 'worked very hard for all those things that were made so difficult for Catholics to gain - wealth, rights and professions'.[33] While Patrick Plunkett showed an interest in political affairs by serving on the Rathmines Urban District Council, it was his son, George Noble Count Plunkett, who cemented family associations with the nationalist movement in Ireland.[34] A papal count and scholarly man, he thrived on education, literature and languages but became increasingly involved in Irish politics, despite his awareness that it was not easy for a young Catholic man of his class and background to be a nationalist at that time, 'particularly if he had intellectual interests or any education'.[35] He studied at Trinity College Dublin and had affiliations with historian Edmund Curtis, scholar Douglas Hyde,[36] and others who 'were all nationalists by intellectual conviction', 'though their heredity did not necessarily bend them in that direction'.[37] Plunkett was appointed as Director of the National Museum in 1907, an appointment that required his attendance at *levées*[38] and other functions at the Vice-Regal Court at Dublin Castle, the seat of Imperialist rule in Ireland.[39] He was also later elected President of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland.[40] This upper-class lifestyle, to which the Count belonged, caught Dillon's imagination when it was described to her as a child and it sparked an enthusiasm to depict it later in her work. Dillon fails to mention, or may have been unaware of, Yeats's heated opposition to her grandfather's appointment to the Museum in the place of Hugh Lane. Lady Gregory, Lane's aunt, recounts that Yeats 'raged over the news', deeming it 'the worst of crimes' to fail to appoint 'a man of genius' in place of 'the timid obedient official'.[41] Yeats even wrote a poem asserting his objections.[42]

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[32] Cranny's daughter Josephine was to become Dillon's maternal grandmother. Later known as Countess Plunkett, she inherited control over 90 properties, owning more than 60 houses and in receipt of ground rent for the remainder.
[33] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 13.
[34] In 1884, as a result of donations of money and property to the Little Company of Mary (the Blue Nuns), a Catholic nursing order in Nottingham, George Plunkett was created a papal count by Pope Leo XIII.
[35] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 21.
[36] Douglas Hyde (1860–1949) was an Irish scholar, founder of the Gaelic League in 1893 and the first President of Ireland from 1938–48.
[37] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks in Ireland" 29.
[38] A *levée*: a reception attended by a British Sovereign or representative of the Crown.
[39] Following his imprisonment in 1916, Count Plunkett was removed from this position, as well as being denied the Directorship of the National Gallery of Ireland.
[40] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 117.

In time, nationalism began to take priority over the Count's royal connections and, having been sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) by his son, Joseph Mary Plunkett, he acted as an emissary to Europe on behalf of the insurgents of the 1916 Rising. Joseph, as chief military strategist, played a central role in planning the Rising and was executed by the British for his part in it. The Count, a man of status with access to the Vatican, had a two-hour private audience with Pope Benedict XV, at which he received a Papal Blessing for the Irish Volunteers who would take up arms against the British.[43] Some controversy surrounds the origin of the request for the Count to undertake this mission, although he asserted that he had been commissioned to do so by the executive of the Irish Volunteers.[44]

Famously, Count Plunkett, then aged sixty-five, went to volunteer at the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin during the Rising, but Joseph, a member of the occupying garrison and anxious for his father's safety, sent him away. The Count was interned and later deported to England for his part in supporting the armed rising. On his return to Ireland, he was elected in 1917 as the first *Sinn Féin* candidate to the Westminster Parliament.[45] He took an abstentionist stance but in 1919 he had a role in establishing *Dáil Éireann*, Ireland's first parliament, and addressed the assembly in the English and French languages. He remained determinedly opposed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, believing that his son Joseph had died for nothing less than a thirty-two county Irish Republic. On his death in 1948, Count Plunkett was honoured with a State funeral and is buried in the Republican plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. His daughter, Geraldine, Eilís Dillon's mother, was also a committed republican and, with her husband Thomas

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[41] Lady Augusta Gregory, *Hugh Lane's Life and Achievements* (London: Murray, 1921) 85.
[42] WB Yeats, "On a Recent Government Appointment in Ireland," *The English Review*, Feb. 1909. The poem was republished and re-titled "An Appointment," *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1914) 138.
[43] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 211.
[44] Jerome Aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914–18: War and Politics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003) 84-6.
[45] He had run against John Dillon of the Irish Party in the by-election in North Roscommon.

Dillon, participated in the preparations for the 1916 rebellion.[46] Dillon's historical novels, with their detailed descriptions of this time in Irish history, testify to the impact that this family involvement had on her throughout her lifetime.

This impressive Plunkett dynasty formed one half of Eilís Dillon's family legacy, a heritage that was absorbed and internalised by her over the greater part of her life, due to the longevity of her mother and of the Plunkett grandparents.

The Dillon Family

Eilís Dillon's received memories and knowledge of her Dillon ancestors 'who belonged within a strong military tradition' were equally formative.[47] From their arrival in Ireland with Sir Henri de Lion (Dillon) of Brittany in the twelfth century, the Dillons played an important role. Known to have fought for King James I against William of Orange in 1690, the Dillons, after the Siege of Limerick in that same year, were among the Irish nobility known as The Wild Geese, who went into exile on the continent of Europe. The Dillons took with them a regiment of soldiers and, in conjunction with other regiments, formed the Irish Brigade in the service of the French King. Along with other *émigré* families, they 'fought in every country in Europe and in their colonies, many of them dying in foreign battlefields'.[48] The Dillons featured in French political and ecclesiastical life for generations. Notable among them are the Catholic Archbishop, Arthur Richard Dillon of Narbonne (1721–1807), who as 'virtual viceroy of Languedoc', lived an extravagant lifestyle; and his nephew, Arthur Dillon, Colonel of the Irish Brigade, who was guillotined in 1794 during the 'Reign of Terror' in France. Members of the Dillon family who remained in Ireland were appointed as Earls of Roscommon under the British system of peerage, and as Barons of the Holy Roman Empire and of Clonbruck. The Roscommon title was suppressed in 1850 as the lineage had died out. The Dillon interest in political activism, although expressed in various ways, persisted throughout subsequent generations in other branches of the family.

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[46] Geraldine's sister, Philomena, also played a role, being dispatched to New York to transmit a message (which was intercepted by the British) to Berlin regarding the proposed landing of arms from the boat *The Aud*. See Plunkett Dillon, *All* 255.

[47] Dillon, *Inside* 10.

[48] Dillon, *Inside* 11.

John Blake Dillon (1814–66), a great, grand-uncle of Eilís Dillon, was a renowned journalist, nationalist and co-founder of the Young Ireland movement. In 1842, with Thomas Davis and Charles Gavan Duffy, in a significant journalistic venture, he established *The Nation*, a newspaper dedicated to the promotion of the nationalist cause. At first, John Blake Dillon advocated the repeal of the Act of Union of 1801, but later, as MP for Tipperary, he denounced the violence proposed by the IRB and supported the idea of a federal union of Ireland and Britain as the only solution to the Irish problem. Political interest and participation continued into the next generation with his son John Dillon who was a leading figure in Westminster for nearly thirty-five years. John Dillon was a land reform agitator and Home Rule activist and was imprisoned for his efforts on six occasions. Initially a supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell within the Irish Parliamentary Party, he later became one of his fiercest opponents in the wake of Parnell's divorce. In an interesting connection between the Dillon and Plunkett families, he also opposed Sir Horace Plunkett in his attempts to unite unionists and nationalists, believing that agrarian dissent was a better means of achieving Home Rule. John Dillon was eventually electorally defeated in 1918 by Eamon de Valera,[49] when *Sinn Féin*[50] came to power. The change in allegiance away from the Irish Parliamentary Party was epitomised in this result, and the Party was dissolved. The Dillons, often with an opposing view to that of the Plunketts, continued to play a part in Irish political life into the next generation when John's son, James Matthew Dillon, a key member of the *Fine Gael* Party founded in 1933, was eventually elected its leader in 1959.

James's second cousin, Thomas Dillon, Eilís's father, was a qualified engineer, a Doctor of Chemistry, and Professor at University College Galway from 1919 to 1954. It is recalled that with a strong sense of patriotic duty he committed himself to research 'that would be of social and economic use to the country and particularly to the west of Ireland'.[51] However, he also used his knowledge of explosives to aid his future brother-in-law, Joseph Plunkett, with strategic planning for the 1916 Rising. Thomas Dillon and Geraldine Plunkett were married on Easter Sunday, 23 April 1916, the day before the insurrection began and the newly-weds watched the fighting in the General Post Office (GPO) in Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) from across the road in the Imperial Hotel. Geraldine explained her reasons for going ahead with her wedding, originally intended as a double celebration with Joseph and his fiancée. She saw that the future was uncertain, her brother would certainly die and the Rising and its consequences would change the world as they had known it. Interestingly, Thomas's cousin, John Dillon MP, appealed to Prime Minister Asquith some days later to stop the executions of the 1916 leaders, stating: 'It is not murderers who are being executed. It is insurgents who fought a clean fight, a brave fight'.[52] The executions triggered a significant change in public attitude in favour of the participants and their cause and, in effect, altered the course of Irish politics. Geraldine had already been heavily involved as a support for her brother Joseph and had stayed with him at the family property in Larkfield, Kimmage, which they used as a training ground for the Irish Volunteers. Her involvement continued through the events of 1916 and the War of Independence. She recounts her arrrest by police, in March 1921, following a raid on her home, as well as her subsequent imprisonment for a month in Galway.[53] She provides accounts of several other incidents where she showed extreme bravery and resourcefulness when confronted by British soldiers. Thomas Dillon, for his part in the War of Independence, spent a year in Gloucester Gaol.

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[49] De Valera, founder of *Fianna Fáil*, later became Taoiseach from 1932–48, 1951–54 and 57–59. He was President of Ireland from 1959–73.

[50] *Sinn Féin* (We Ourselves) was a political movement founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith.

[51] Tadhg Foley, ed. *From Queen's College to National University, Essays on the Academic History of QCG, UCG, NUIG* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999) 229.

Eilís Dillon's parents, with their combined family histories, as well as their personal involvement during Ireland's transition from the status of colony to its emergence as a Free State, were a major influence on her thinking. She describes how, after the Civil War, her father became fixed 'into a fanatical desire to build up the country that Patrick Pearse[54] had envisaged, where everyone would have an opportunity of education [...] and self confidence would replace the dispirited attitudes which stultified all progress'.[55] This vision was transmitted to Dillon and she, in turn, articulated it in her writing for children, by encouraging a similar confidence in young people who would shape the future of Ireland. The author's emphasis on this need for confidence will be explored in relation to her children's literature in Chapter Three of this thesis.

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[52] Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (London: Corgi, Transworld, 1968) 175.

[53] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series" 1.
Eilís Dillon professed to remember this occasion, although she was just a year old at the time.

[54] Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) teacher, barrister poet, was executed for his leadership of the 1916 Rising.

[55] Dillon, *Inside* 93.

The Plunketts and Dillons, diverse in their abilities, yet united in their loyalty to Ireland, had contributed to Irish history and culture as politicians, military men, statesmen, church leaders, entrepreneurs and social reformers, all serving their country with distinction. Dillon was greatly influenced by the political and social ideals of her family and was also keenly aware of the record of her forebears, both distant and immediate, and of their stature and success. In her historical fiction in particular, Dillon reflects on their patriotism, details their notable achievements and conveys their beliefs and opinions. Later chapters will explore the enormous influence that this pride in her ancestry had on her work.

Very Early Memories

However, Eilís Dillon's early experience of her family's involvement in political events proved traumatic. Kiely, referring to the fact that Dillon's father, Thomas, was on the run from British forces at the time of her birth and that her mother Geraldine was arrested soon after she was born, explains: 'The stresses of the times told on the girl-child, not obviously enough through her own experience, but through words and stories half-understood; and perhaps, through the atmosphere. There are certain things that affect the air, and children are sensitive organisms'.[56]

Dillon claims that her memories began at the age of one with her mother's arrest and subsequent imprisonment for a month in Galway Gaol. She describes the fear that she felt as a consequence, the uncertainty of her early life and the sense of instability within her home caused by the political situation. In the heightened atmosphere of the War of Independence, Dillon was beset by 'night terrors', by fears of men in uniform and of the sounds of the countryside, 'as if there was a hidden mass of evil which might at any moment break loose and overwhelm us all'. Above all, the young Dillon was terrified of the house being surrounded, of the thought of yet another move to a safe place for her parents who were repeatedly threatened with arrest, or worse, of their disappearance from her life. She recalls the insecurity of a time when she felt 'it would be foolish to put one's trust in parents who might be dragged away or go on the run at any moment'.[57] The knowledge that her uncle, Joseph, had been executed must have caused an added sense of anxiety. Kiely notes that this feeling was shared by other descendants of the 1916 leaders and he highlights the resulting trauma as 'the sensation of knowing what it was like to grow up, half-comprehending, under the shadow of 1916, and the years of tumult that followed'.[58]

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[56] Kiely, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 17 July 1982.

Dillon's awareness of the memory of these and other historical events, as directly experienced by, or narrated to, her is central to an understanding of her work. She recounts that she and her siblings, eager to understand, listened intently: 'Our ears were stretched to add to our own first-hand knowledge and to make a complete picture'. These recollections formed such an impression, that Dillon later wrote: 'I can never live in the country now, because of those nights'.[59] This is an unusual comment from a writer, whose lyrical and emotive descriptions of the countryside were widely complimented and formed part of her literary trademark. However, it is also elucidating since, although she visited the west as an adult, she always viewed it through a lens of retrospection, in which the more disturbing aspects had become blurred or effaced with time and were replaced with more pleasant and romanticised memories. Dillon's intense attachment to the rural landscape and its language will be outlined in Chapter Two.

Individual memory, such as that experienced by Dillon, is linked to collective memory, as recollections are savoured, shared and exchanged. The family, as a group, has its own particular memory with individual reminiscences contributing to the collective store. As Halbwachs states, 'family recollections in fact develop in so many different soils, in the consciousness of various members of the domestic group'.[60] He explains that each family retains its own mental force, 'its memories which it alone commemorates and its secrets that are revealed only to its members'.[61] In most families, forebears disappear into the past and 'the only ancestors transmitted and retained are those whose memory has become the object of a cult by men who remain at least fictitiously in contact with them. The others become part of an anonymous mass'.[62] Upper-class propertied families generally tend to cherish an awareness of family history by handing down genealogies and details of bequests and restorations of property. In the case of families such as the Plunketts and the Dillons, who have contributed to public life over generations, the memory of their actions in helping to shape the nation forms part of the public record and also moulds the historical memory of its people. Dillon's mother, Geraldine, keen to recount the family story and its involvement in the nationalist movement, kept copious documentation that provided material for the publication of her memoirs.[63] Rather remarkably, Geraldine claimed to remember her own birth and links it to a significant political event. She writes: 'I was born on November 27th 1891, the year of Parnell's funeral. I remember being born: a slimy tube, choking, hearing talk and then nothing', a claim that must be viewed with a degree of scepticism and an awareness of Zerubavel's warning that early recollections can be viewed as 'only reinterpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family'.[64]

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[57] Dillon, *Inside* 75.
[58] Kiely, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 17 July 1982.
[59] Dillon, *Inside* 62; 76.
[60] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory* 59.
[61] Halbwachs 59.

As time elapses, memories of events fade, narration takes on new tones and personal emphases, and results in a subjective recounting which, in turn, becomes accepted and embedded. In this way, the events become altered in the re-telling. The person who tells the story has to 'translate his recollections so as to communicate them' and writers, in their turn, 'compose it anew and introduce elements borrowed from several periods which preceded or followed the scene in question'.[65] As stories pass from generation to generation, they create a sort of literary Chinese whispers, as some elements are embellished in the telling, and others are neglected or discarded. Carl Becker, cited by Lowenthal, explains:

> All our yesterdays diminish and grow dim [...] in the lengthening perspective of the centuries, even the most stirring events [...] must inevitably, for posterity, fade away into pale replicas of the original picture, for each succeeding generation losing, as they recede into a

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[62] Halbwachs 73.

[63] National Library of Ireland, Manuscripts Collection, Geraldine Plunkett Dillon Papers, Collection No. 43.

[64] in Olick & Robbins 123.

[65] Halbwachs 61.

> more distant past, some significance that once was noted in them, some quality of enchantment that once was theirs.[66]

Conversely, distance can enhance the received memories and Lowenthal expands on this, stating, 'Above all, memory transforms the past we have known into what we think it should have been. Selective recall eliminates undesired scenes, highlights favored ones, and makes them tidy and suitable'.[67] For Eilís Dillon, her own past and that of her family, as recounted by her mother and others, merge to form a collective past, each an extension of the other. Dillon formed her personal memory within a family whose history was woven into the fabric of the national tapestry. By recounting the story of her forebears and her immediate relatives, she fed from family memory into the larger collective repository of the nation itself. Dillon became a cipher in passing on precious family memories, both glorious and tragic, to the next generation. This was significant in an Ireland where, as Becker points out, many people 'remember historical trauma as though past and present were contemporaneous. To an Irish patriot, the behavior of Cromwell, the Act of Union, and the Famine of 1847 are events as real as today's'.[68] Dillon, with a heightened awareness of the past reconstructed through memory, may have been encouraged to take on the role of narrator of this history, since her family, in addition to their historical importance, had also maintained a tradition within literature.

Family Background in Literature

For Dillon, the initial decision to be a writer was vocational, not merely recreational, and stemmed from another dynamic aspect to her family inheritance; namely a broad appreciation of the wider world of literature and writing. Dillon was proud of what she viewed as a strong literary heritage that gave her standing as an author. She hoped to add her name to those who had already achieved in this field. With a biblical resonance towards lost talents, she states:

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[66] David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *The Geographical Review* 65:1 (Jan. 1975) 24.
[67] Lowenthal 28.
[68] Lowenthal 28.

> As every artist knows, along with his gift is born recognition of its value, an intuition that tells him that his talent has been given to him to trade with, not to be buried in the ground and returned unmultiplied at the end of his life. Without this intuition no artist would go to work at all in the first place. [69]

In today's terms, this view of trading one's talent would be described as a form of cultural or intellectual capital with which Dillon could earn recognition for both herself and her country. Proud of the fine background of erudition among the Dillons and Plunketts, and eager to highlight and perhaps bolster the family literary achievement, she presents in *Inside Ireland* their varied literary interests as writers and collectors of rare books. With the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII in 1539, Richard Plunkett, the last Catholic Abbot of Kells, is credited with saving the illuminated manuscript *The Book of Kells* from certain destruction.[70] Wentworth Dillon, Fourth Earl of Roscommon, was a poet of considerable standing during the seventeenth century and is famed for his translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* and for his treatise on translation.[71] In the twentieth century, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron of Dunsany, achieved renown as a writer of short stories, and as a playwright and novelist who was critically acclaimed for his versatility and as one of the 'forerunners of the modern fantasy genre'.[72] He was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a member of the Irish Academy, and was known for his patronage of the young poet Francis Ledwidge.[73] Closer relatives were also significant since Dillon's grandfather, Count Plunkett, a bibliophile and avid book collector, wrote a scholarly work on the Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli, while Dillon's uncle, Joseph Mary Plunkett was a poet of some stature whose brief career ended abruptly in 1916.[74]

Notably, on the Dillon side of the family, Henrietta-Lucy Dillon, Marquise de la Tour du Pin, a lady in waiting to Queen Marie Antoinette of France, in a vivid memoir which Dillon later used for her research, wrote a first-hand account of the doomed royal court. In describing her fellow aristocrats blindly 'laughing and dancing' their way 'to the precipice', the Marquise was deemed to be the chronicler of her age.[75] However, Dillon's parents were perhaps a more immediate influence since her mother had written poetry,[76] and her father a play, in addition to a chemistry textbook in the Irish language.[77] They were both friendly with Irish poets and writers of their generation. Geraldine describes her encounters with Padraic Colum, Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and James Stephens, as well as her grandfather's enduring friendship with Oscar Wilde.[78] Conscious of the influence of those who had gone before and of her family connections with them, Dillon proudly asserts: 'Literature breaks out in all branches of the family sooner or later'.[79] In a justification for her own efforts and recognising the influence of family ancestry, Dillon embracing, in Renan's terms, the cult of her own ancestry and her obligation towards them, shows empathic understanding of Yeats and the duty he felt towards his forebears:

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[69] Dillon, 33323, "Poets of the Revolution" 25.

[70] Dillon, *Inside* 10. The manuscript was given to Archbishop Ussher and later acquired by the library of Trinity College, Dublin where it is on display to the public.

[71] Dillon, *Inside* 10.

[72] Lord Dunsany – Friend of the Native Irish, 10 Apr. 2011 http://www.irishidentity.com/extras/gaels/stories/dunsany.htm.

[73] Francis Ledwidge (1887–1917) was an Irish poet killed in action in World War I on the Western Front.

[74] George Noble Plunkett, (Count) *Sandro Boticelli* (London: G. Bell & Co, 1900).

> He felt their blood coursing in his veins as people do who have had vital, forceful, active ancestors. They hear the voices of these people urging them, pointing out to them what can be done in their generation, and they feel a responsibility to those ancestors as if they would one day be answerable to them for their life's work. This is a real, living force especially in the lives of many artists.[80]

In desiring to portray the achievements of these literary ancestors, Dillon undertook an absorbing life's work and a particular literary path. Already advantaged as a result of her family's rich literary background, she felt it was incumbent upon her to exploit her abilities and to continue with the family tradition of literary endeavour.

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[75] Henrietta-Lucy Dillon de la Tour du Pin Gouvernet, *Memoirs of Madame de la Tour du Pin: Laughing and Dancing Our Way to the Precipice*, trans. Felice Harcourt (London: Harvill Press, 1999).

[76] Geraldine Plunkett Dillon, *Magnificat* (Dublin: The Candle Press, 1917).

[77] "Death of Professor Thomas P. Dillon," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 13 Dec. 1971, 20 Feb. 2010 http://irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1971/12/13/Pg005.html. The play, *The Commissioner*, was staged in the Abbey Theatre in 1964.

[78] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 8.

[79] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 36.

[80] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 38.

Dillon claims that, due to her awareness of literary figures and of the family links with them, she was inspired to make early attempts at writing. She describes how she began with simple tales at the age of seven when she could no longer conceal the fact that her 'head was full of stories'. However, she remembers being self-conscious and sensitive to the criticisms of her siblings. She recounts her difficulty, as the third child in the family, in trying to prove herself to the others: 'If I revealed my thoughts, they were foolish and provided ammunition for further attacks. If I concealed my thoughts, I was deceitful and stupid'. She describes how, on showing her stories at home, that 'after a casual compliment', her efforts were quickly dismissed and it seemed 'dangerous to draw attention' to herself, although, she refers to her father as a more benign critic who 'was amused by the moral tone' of some of these early efforts.[81] Dillon's sensitivity to criticism and her consistent awareness of how her work was accepted became a more intense personal challenge as her career developed, and raises questions about the effect that this early family commentary had on her progress as an emerging writer.

As a voracious reader from an early age, Dillon was fortunate to grow up 'in a house full of books where you could read your way though any literary movement with ease'.[82] In addition, she recalls that, in what was a good foundation for an aspiring writer, Count Plunkett 'fed' her with books, introducing her to German romances, Homer's *Odyssey* and to the works of Virgil and Ovid.[83] Much later, when writing about the importance of quality reading material for young people, she stated that children 'handle books as if they were shaking hands with a stranger' who, given time, they will come to know well.[84] Dillon's own reaction to her early reading was not just that of an initial, perfunctory greeting with writers. Rather, as will be detailed later in this chapter, she recalls these encounters as momentous events - defining, formative and illuminating. The lessons learned about the art of writing from each of these reading experiences stayed with Dillon and greatly influenced her developing philosophy concerning her chosen craft.

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[81] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 2; 2; 9; 9.
[82] Dillon, 33329, "Seán O'Faoláin and the Young Writer" 41.
[83] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 12.
[84] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books for the Irish Library" 30.

Family Relationships

Dillon's mother and grandmother were strong, formidable women who made a considerable personal impression on her when she was growing up. Living in their shadow impacted greatly on Dillon's self-esteem and on her approach to writing as a career choice. Specifically, the triangular female relationship, of which she was a part, was instrumental in forming her opinions on life, education and the role of women in society.

Dillon's maternal grandmother, Countess Mary Josephine Cranny Plunkett (the Countess) was an heiress and, as stated, a woman of many properties, who, according to her daughter was prone to erratic and irrational behaviour. Geraldine writes that she would, on a whim, regularly disappear and go on lengthy trips abroad, leaving her, a mere child, with the sole responsibility of running a large household since her father, the Count, took little interest in domestic matters. Geraldine describes the Countess as bad-tempered, eccentric, capricious, volatile and often neglectful of her children. She details her cruelty and violence, and the ways in which her daughters, in particular, suffered 'humiliation and degradation' at her hands. Despite the Countess's considerable financial assets, she behaved in a miserly and impractical fashion and often left her children short of food and basic clothing for school. One daughter, Moya, was treated so harshly that at one point she was reduced to 'a wretched shuddering female who could not possibly have any judgement or make up her own mind'.[85]

By contrast, Eilís Dillon's relationship with the Countess was very successful. As a child she was allegedly, in a form of recompense, 'singled out for kindness' by her because she resembled Moya the daughter she had treated so badly in the past.[86] Resident in Galway and attending school in Sligo, Dillon fondly recalls time spent at her grandparents' home in Dublin during a difficult period in her young life. With a hint at the sense of neglect that she felt at home, Dillon describes being sent to start at the Sligo school a month later than the other students, being shown 'briskly' to the train by her mother, and left to travel the eighty mile journey alone on her first day.[87] At the age of eleven, she was removed from school for a time, since, by her own account, she 'was an outsider'.[88] Dillon contends that being two years younger than her classmates but academically ahead of them in many subjects, she did not fit in. This points to a deep unhappiness that was relieved only by her stay in Dublin when she became 'friends with her grandmother and remained so'. She remembers that she had time to think there and she began to write poetry.[89] Her grandmother also recognised her musical ability and arranged for her to have cello lessons, from which Dillon gained both enormous pleasure and a life-long interest in music. At one stage, she even considered a career as a professional cellist. The interlude in Dublin seems to have been a formative and happy experience for the young Eilís, during which she grew in confidence. This was in stark contrast to what Geraldine described as the 'sulphurous' atmosphere of the Plunkett household when she was growing up.[90]

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[85] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 116.
[86] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 116; 317.
[87] Dillon, *Inside* 139.

Although the product of an unusual upbringing, Geraldine was made of sterner stuff than her siblings and was determined to stand up for herself against the Countess. She learned 'not to depend on anyone', devoting her life to a quest for independence. While she had only received intermittent schooling, she was, by her own account, well read and had managed to attain a high standard in most subjects. She, therefore, demanded the right to go to university, even paying her own fees when her mother refused to pay. In 1909, Geraldine embarked on degree courses in Arts and then Medicine at University College, Dublin, which she did not conclude. She became immersed in university life and insisted that she and other women students be allowed to become members of the Literary and Historical Society, to join the Students' Union and to participate fully in college life in a way which had hitherto been denied to them. Geraldine attended *céilidhes* (Irish dances) held by the students' National Literary Society, which was, she states, a cover for the IRB. She was stimulated by meeting 'people who were interested in ideas and in the future of Ireland' and most of them 'became comrades' in their mutual aspiration for national independence. Geraldine Plunkett mingled with a group of intellectuals, among them her future husband, people who were to become the 'most distinguished figures in politics and the professions in this State for the next forty years'. She finally escaped from her mother's influence by choosing to move out of the family home to care for her brother, Joseph, who suffered from ill health. She rejoiced in her personal independence, which she describes as 'spiritual, political, philosophical', but made more wonderful by the 'absence of criticism of every step we took'.[91]

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[88] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 10.
[89] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 12.
[90] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 95.

Strong-minded and opinionated, Geraldine continued to be influential within the family sphere and was an important figure in Dillon's life, especially in passing on her memories to her. She lived to the age of ninety-four, dying a mere eight years before Eilís herself. Geraldine is described as 'a hugely talented, immensely assertive woman to whom Eilís remained emotionally attached all her life'.[92] Others have described the situation more candidly. Declan Kiberd recalls Eilís's relationship with her mother as 'highly problematic', seeing it as possibly arising from Dillon's traumatic childhood experience during the War of Independence and 'some almost fatal sense of separation at an early stage when bonding was necessary and didn't happen'.[93] Dillon's son, Cormac, describes 'an uneasy relationship with her family of origin' and claims that 'her parents had not treated her equitably' within the family. For example, in a replication of her own difficulties with family legacy, both emotional and financial, Geraldine objected strongly when Eilís was willed a share of the Countess's property.[94]

Geraldine is also described as a demanding person, not much given to praising others: 'It was as if nothing you did was quite good enough'.[95] This is demonstrated in her dealings with Eilís, who was treated differently to her sisters in the matter of education. As a result of what she deems her 'failure at eleven' in the school system, a belief had taken root in the family that, in spite of enjoying the same successes as her siblings, she was 'incapable of profiting from extensive education'. Eilís had 'wanted above all things to study French literature and language' but Geraldine did not see that as necessary, as she already had ample access to books, and anyway, 'all educated people spoke French'. It was strange that Geraldine, who had been angry at her own mother's obstructionist attitude to the career choices of her daughters, was unwilling, in her turn, to allow Eilís to pursue her dream. Almost excusing this behaviour, Dillon explains, saying that her mother 'had the most unconventional mind of anyone she had ever known' and that, in this instance, 'her imagination went wild'.

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[91] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 73; 112; 133; 129.
[92] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing up in a writer's head," *Treasure Islands, Studies in Children's Literature*, eds. Mary Shine Thompson & Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) 201.
[93] Declan Kiberd, Personal Interview, 1 Feb. 2011.
[94] Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing" 201–2.
[95] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Personal Interview, 10 June 2010.

In 1939, Geraldine made the very strange decision for a woman of her class to send Eilís to work as a housemaid in a succession of Dublin hotels, while her other daughters were given the opportunity to study law and medicine at university. Eilís bitterly resented the menial work that she was forced to do. She recalls: 'I tried to draw my family's attention to my plight [...] but without good result'. She then had a plan to take an *au pair* job in France and Switzerland, which, with the outbreak of the World War II, became impossible to effect. It seems that Geraldine put forward the view that a 'university education would probably destroy her confidence as a writer'.[96] In fact, the reverse was the case in Dillon's view, and the lack of a university degree was something 'which caused her intermittent pain' throughout her life.[97] She was aggrieved at not having had the same educational opportunities that were afforded to her sisters. She also believed that a degree would have given her credibility when she began writing, and she admitted: 'I felt ignorant, wishing as I have often done since, that I had a quiet PhD in some obscure subject, where I could dodder my life away in decent privacy'.[98] Ó Cuilleanáin notes that, despite a brilliant school career, Eilís was not channelled towards further study and he comments that 'this always bothered her'.[99] Her resentment at her fate surfaces in her writing and becomes something of a running theme in her novels for both children and adults. In *The Children of Bach*, a book published just two years before she died, Dillon, still bearing her disappointment, pointedly refers to the character, Aunt Eva, as being 'only good for housework' since she 'never had a chance' to gain an education.[100] Yet Aunt Eva, like Dillon herself, is clearly intelligent, well read and self-educated, and spends her time reading Voltaire's *Candide*.[101] Dillon's memory of these grievances scarred her but she always maintained an outer calm and tended to justify her mother's decisions, often blaming the war for not proceeding in education.[102] Declan Kiberd remarks that she never publicly showed anger at what happened and somehow rose above the situation.[103]

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[96] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 12; 11; 15; 12.
[97] Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing" 202.
[98] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 20.
[99] Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing" 202.
[100] Eilís Dillon, *The Children of Bach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993) 142.
[101] Dillon, *Children* 45.
[102] David Hanly, Television Interview, *Writer in Profile*, Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) Libraries and Archives, 30 June 1993.

In the absence of encouragement from her family, Dillon was fortunate to receive affirmation from her first husband, Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin. The couple had met in Waterford at a summer school for the teaching of the Irish language and married soon afterwards when Eilís was just twenty years old. Cormac, seventeen years her senior and an established professor of Irish in Cork University, was a man of learning, 'a peaceful scholar' who helped her in numerous ways.[104] Dillon speaks of his 'tremendous encouragement' and support in ensuring that she had enough domestic help to free up time for her writing.[105] He also acted as a guiding hand, often helping her to compose letters to publishers or reading her drafts and commenting on them.[106] She admired his abilities and relied on him for advice, stating in interview: 'His academic training, his ability to spot propaganda, his insistence that one must always have solid reasons for what one wrote, were assets he passed freely on to me'.[107] Their daughter, poet Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, explains that although Dillon never attended university, she spent much of her life in the company of academics within a college environment. She believes that in some ways, Dillon, deprived of formal qualifications, lived in the shadow of those with degrees and yearned to truly belong to this world, always seeking to live up to academic standards through her writing career.[108] Dillon, in a later explanation for this ambition, posits that there is a 'constant attraction' between the scholarly and the artistic mind in that 'both have a secret longing to cross the boundary and enjoy each other's world'.[109] Despite feeling something of an outsider, she enjoyed a busy life as the wife of a college professor. She was, as she describes herself, 'able and willing' and took on the job of running a hostel in Cork University, housing thirty-nine male students.[110] Her son also describes Dillon's capacity for work at that time: 'She ordered her supplies, marshalled her staff and ran her household with an appearance of smooth authority while managing to carve exactly two and a half hours of writing time out of each day'.[111]

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[103] Kiberd, Interview.

[104] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 18.

[105] Michael Campbell, "Books and Authors," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 Mar. 1958, 9 Nov. 2009 http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1974/0305/Pg010.html.

[106] His comments appear on some of Dillon's documents in the Dillon Family Archive.

[107] "Kay Kent talks to Eilís Dillon," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 5 Mar. 1974.

[108] Ní Chuilleanáin, Interview.

[109] Dillon, "The Making of an Idealist," Rev. of *The Singing Masters* by John O'Meara, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 1990.

[110] Dillon, 33320, "Able and Willing".

Dillon decided that 'inspiration must be invited and that it descends on the same spot where it found its host the day before'[112] and so, on a daily basis, she determinedly pursued her ambition to become a professional writer and enjoyed this pursuit as 'a lifeline'.[113] At a time when it was expected that women should content themselves with home making, Dillon was not happy to adhere to the accepted ideal of 'the educated wife and mother'. She longed for independence and to earn a living from her work.[114] Ó Cuilleanáin believes that the social constraints of his mother's position as a housewife could be repressive and that 'building a separate career, and a new persona as a writer, meant escape into her own imaginative and professional world'. He explains that his mother wrote for a number of reasons: 'To get out of being herself, to heal her own childhood, to be something other than be the wife of a professor at a time when wives knew their place'.[115] Ní Chuilleanáin makes the point that Dillon's children's stories are often about her own 'liberation from the domestic world' to a world of adventure or to a former time. This was a freedom not available in other careers but attainable through her writing.[116] Kiberd recalls that, in successfully juggling her duties in the home with her work, she had held what would now be regarded as feminist ideals 'before that generation had theorised itself'. He remembers Dillon saying of herself and fellow writer Máire Mhac an tSaoi: 'We just went and did it and did it for ourselves'.[117] In doing so, Dillon showed great determination and a desire to overcome her personal inhibitions.

An *Irish Times* reviewer remarked in 1958, as Dillon's career was becoming established, that writing for children was 'a department of publishing that tends to suffer critical neglect' and that it was women who tended to 'dominate the market'.[118] Dillon was conscious of critical public opinion regarding female writers, including the attitude of the 'Cork literate bourgeoisie' and states that these attitudes contributed to caution in choosing to write for children. Revealing her lack of confidence, she explains: 'That is why I decided to write children's books first, since they would attract less attention and be thought a harmless hobby for a young mother'.[119] Dillon expressed admiration for some female authors, including Maria Edgeworth, Lady Gregory, Mary Lavin and Alice Curtayne, whom she regarded as accomplished writers who had found their place in the literary world irrespective of gender or genre. She aimed, through hard work and determination, to establish herself similarly as a writer who would be appreciated for her literary skill and attainment.

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[111] Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing" 201.
[112] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 23.
[113] Ó Cuilleanáin, "Growing" 201.
[114] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 12.
[115] Ó Cuilleanáin "Growing" 202; 208.
[116] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, "The wild and the tame in children's literature," *Treasure Islands, Studies in Children's Literature*, eds. Mary Shine Thompson & Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) 190.
[117] Kiberd, Interview.

Nationalist Influence

While family personalities, both male and female, were undoubtedly a major influence on Eilís Dillon in personal and literary matters, the Plunkett espousal of nationalism was very significant in shaping the direction of Dillon's career. Already imbued with a sense of Ireland's struggle for independence, she viewed the heroes of 1916 as writers and visionaries to whom she referred as 'the poets of the revolution'.[120] Admiring the poems of Patrick Pearse for their intensity and force of feeling, she singles out "The Wayfarer" for special mention, seeing it 'as an evocation of the beauty of Ireland, physical and spiritual', which was never surpassed. She also praises the spiritual elements within the poetry of her uncle, Joseph Mary Plunkett, and his 'intense preoccupation with the teaching of Christ'. Most of all, she praises the work of family friend, Thomas MacDonagh, his ability to write 'with freedom and ease' and his 'development of an idea in a crescendo of words as if it were piling one sensation on another until the reader shares completely in the poet's experience'. Dillon's romanticised impression is enhanced by the manner and timing of their deaths, finding all of them 'tantalising in the promise they give and never had time to fulfil'. In an affirmation of their role as both poets and visionaries, she reminds us that *file*, the Irish word for poet, means 'he who sees', or 'visionary' and 'shaper of things to come', and she states that the poet 'may be a man of vision in practical matters as well as in the practice of his art'. In a justification of their actions, Dillon states that the sensitivities of these poets gave them an understanding of what had to be done for their country and that, while they were idealistic, they never lost sight of the rationale behind their struggle. She maintains that their form of nationalism was not of the 'narrow' kind,[121] but was born out of a concern for their people at a time of widespread poverty in Ireland and that it was a reflection of their 'generosity and charity' that these poets 'could not stand aside and see the sufferings of the Irish people and do nothing about it'.[122]

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[118] Campbell, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 Mar. 1958.
[119] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 9.
[120] Dillon, 33323, "Poets".

Dillon appears oblivious to the irony that the Plunkett family were wealthy landlords but 'seethed with rage' at the poverty in Dublin in 1913, causing them to espouse the nationalist cause in strong and determined resistance.[123] Dillon fails to allude to the fact that her grandmother, the Countess, owned slum tenement properties in Abbey Street, Dublin, paid her workers poorly, was part of a whispering campaign against trade unionist James (Jim) Larkin, the workers' champion and reacted with fury to her children's espousal of his cause.[124] Ignoring this paradoxical opinion within the family, Dillon instead highlights the raising of consciousness among the general public after the 1916 Rising and, with enormous pride in the achievements of its leaders, proclaims: 'I know what it was that the poets died for, and it has been truly wonderful to grow up in a state founded by poets and to see the gradual fulfilment of their dreams'.[125] She further remarks: 'On the whole, I regard the Irish Revolution as one of the most successful in history' adding that 'these people who founded our state for us displayed astonishing single-mindedness and integrity'. She justifies their subsequent actions and collapse into civil war as due to utter exhaustion with the cause and because 'the human mind can only take so much stress'. She urges that they must be viewed within the prism of their own times and context, and that credit should be given to them for their vision and their staying power.[126] Dillon, in all of her comments, defends the actions of these leaders, glorifying their efforts uncritically, although even within her family home there were divisions. She recalls the political arguments that 'whistled and whirled' above the heads of herself and her siblings as her parents came to grips with grief at the loss of so many friends and relatives in the fight for independence. The Anglo-Irish Treaty had divided opinion within the broader family, with the Plunketts 'on the Republican side and Anti-Treaty to the day of their deaths', and the Dillons 'more inclined towards constitutional methods' and in a denial of the inevitability of Civil War, 'innocently', hoping 'that Irish unity would be restored without bloodshed'. She remembers that, as children, they 'detested the anger' expressed but later welcomed the fact that such discussion led to an awareness of politics 'without hiding the facts'. She notes that there was no sense of triumph when the Free State was established in 1922 since, as her parents prophesied, 'partition would be a source of trouble as long as it lasted'.[127] Dillon also claims that hatred had no part in the reminiscences of her parents on the events of these years since 'failures were attributed to weakness of character, or bad judgment, or lack of understanding of what was required at the time, or a conflict of principle discovered too late'.[128]

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[121] Dillon, *Inside* 59.

[122] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 8; 8; 24; 27; 28; 1; 31.

[123] Dillon, *Inside* 61.

[124] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 144.

[125] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 32.

[126] Dillon, 33321, "The Historical Novel with Special Reference to Ballinalee" 17.

As writers and intellectuals, her family and their friends accommodated the old militarist nationalism to comply with a form more suited to an independent state. By the time that Dillon was a published writer in 1948, the twenty-six counties were established as a democratic Republic and a new sense of nationalist spirit was evolving. This involved not only patriotic concern but what Gibbs terms 'the search for the truth about man, the quintessential nature of his character and world',[129] a sort of rediscovery of what Nicholas Mansergh calls the 'purpose of nationality' that 'was invariably forgotten in the immediate struggle for independence'.[130] Irish nationalism itself 'underwent significant redefinition and enrichment' necessitated by Ireland's growing status as an independent country.[131] In time, it no longer became a question of territorial freedom but one of intellectual thought and expression, a liberty that, due to the constraints of Church and State, took several generations to achieve.

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[127] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 3.

[128] Dillon, 33321, "Historical Novel" 9.

[129] AM Gibbs, "Shaw's Other Island," *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750-1950s*, eds. Oliver MacDonagh, WF Mandle & Pauric Travers (Canberra, London: The Macmillan Press, 1983) 126.

[130] HV Brasted, "Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century," MacDonagh et al. 84.

[131] Brasted 84.

Literary Influences

While nationalist in outlook, there were other factors at play in Dillon's family since, as professional people of property with a 'tradition of civilisation and learning', they were linked historically to Anglo-Irish values. Dillon, conscious of the Plunkett connection with this background, aimed to establish a kinship with the English-speaking thinkers and writers of that tradition, primarily through Yeats and, by association, with those he had claimed as his influences. These included Bishop Berkeley, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith and other great Irish figures of the eighteenth century who formed, 'an aristocracy of intellect'.[132] Dillon sought inspiration in their writings and, in particular, in those of Jonathan Swift, from which she quoted liberally in her fiction. In him she recognised, as her mother had done, 'a clear-sighted genius' who wrote with 'savage indignation' of the 'wretched conditions' under which the native Irish lived and who pleaded for 'plain Christian justice'. She also saw him as the embodiment of 'the overwhelming sense of responsibility' that she continuously attaches to the writer. She admired Oscar Wilde for other reasons, namely 'his originality and his capacity to break through the stifling Victorian stuffiness that pervaded Ireland as well as England at the time'.[133] Dillon aspired to emulate the spirit of these Anglo-Irish writers and orators who, displaying the manners of the British ruling classes, wrote with wit and polish. They had what Terence de Vere White describes as 'a particular grace and elegance of phrase', accompanied by an ability to deliver 'fine sentiments in silver tones', sometimes delivered with academic humour and a 'throwaway' manner.[134] Dillon, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, sought to parallel this style of wit in some of her novels.

However, it was to Yeats that she turned in her early years for immediate inspiration. As a schoolgirl in Sligo, she felt an affinity with the local poet and, at the age of sixteen, already a disciple of Yeats, she translated some of his work into French.[135] Later, in homage to him, and in admiration of his nationalist opinions,

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[132] A term attributed to Plato. Nigel Guy Wilson, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[133] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 9; 222; 15; 24; 27.
[134] Terence de Vere White, *The Anglo-Irish* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972) 22–24.
[135] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 12.

Dillon selected titles for two of her historical novels from his poems.[136] The poet had also famously addressed the issue of the execution of the leaders of the 1916 Rising and its effects on society, a topic close to Dillon's heart, thus providing a further link.[137] Hoping to follow in the Yeatsian tradition and to stay true to what she saw as her literary heritage, Dillon at an early stage resorted to what she saw as the safe harbour of retrospection, a position that may have impeded her from adopting some more experimental forms of expression. As a direct descendant of the Revival period, she shared, through family memory, the poet's understanding of the Anglo-Irish tradition. Dillon could also be said to mimic Yeats, since he engaged, albeit in the poetic form rather than in prose, 'with themes, motifs or images' drawn from that tradition.[138] Although from a Catholic background, her family's experience of owning property gave her an understanding of the plight of the landlords of the Ascendancy class trying desperately to retain and maintain large houses. In allying herself with Yeats, Dillon was espousing the traditional, the rural and the romantic, rather than the stylistically innovative and ironic approach of Ireland's other renowned writer, James Joyce. Dillon admired Joyce's work, referring to *Ulysses* as 'the father and mother of all Irish novels'[139] but she claims commonality with the writer only through an alleged linguistic link with the west of Ireland, rather than through his modernist approach.[140]

Affiliations to both Yeats and Joyce are expected among Irish writers who are unavoidably working in the literary shadow of these two 'unignorable turn-of-the-century writers'.[141] Not only do these prestigious figures evoke from new generations of writers, responses that vary 'from imitation, admiration, dependency, to modification, hesitation, anxiety, separation, subversion, rejection, (and) reaction',[142] but they also provide two very different and equally significant points of comparison against which new writers can be critiqued. Poet TS Eliot pointed to the tradition whereby emerging writers avidly read the great masters of literature and seek to follow in their literary path. Believing in an inherent link between writers past and present, he wrote: 'The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer, and with it the whole of the literature of his country, has a simultaneous existence'.[143] Dillon was acutely aware of the benefits of tradition but was less alert to its dangers. Fidelity to the past should not be at the expense of innovation but should be a means of enhancing it since a too close affiliation with precursors can lead to undue reliance on their example and the production of derivative work. It can cause a sense of stagnation, a return to old themes and a failure to invent new modes of expression to suit the contemporary world. Dillon's tendency to refer back to earlier literary themes at the expense of innovation will be demonstrated in later chapters as a major factor within her writing.

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[136] The title *Across the Bitter Sea* is borrowed from the WB Yeats poem "The Rose Tree" (1921) in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) - The Works of WB Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994) 154; and *The Bitter Glass* from the poem "The Two Trees" (1893) in *The Rose* (1893) *The Works of WB Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994) 40.

[137] WB Yeats, "Easter 1916," *Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) - The Works of WB Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994) 152.

[138] Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 32.

[139] Dillon, *Inside* 156.

[140] Dillon, 33335, 37. Also in "The Innocent Muse," - "An Interview with Maria Jolas," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 20.1 (Fall 1982) (University of Tulsa, Oklahoma).

[141] Corcoran vii.

[142] Corcoran viii.

Influence of Contemporary Writers

Dillon took great comfort from the literature of the past but she sought more immediate guidance from contemporary writers. She admits that as time moved on, and particularly with the advent of World War II, earlier writers, 'except for Yeats', seemed 'remote' from her life. Anxious to learn her craft, she found fresh role models among Ireland's new generation of writers. Her discovery of the writings of Seán O'Faoláin led to some liberation of her thinking and acted as a spur to her ambition.

Dillon recalls something of a *coup de foudre* when, as a sixteen year old in 1936, she first encountered O'Faoláin's novel *Bird Alone*. She later wrote: 'I'll never forget its impact, man-sized and positive, despite its elegaic tone'. She admired O'Faoláin for his bravery in not flinching from difficult subject matter and in using personal experiences as material for his work. She also lauded his use of language 'with its rhythms and its certainty' and his 'use of what was obviously a regional idiom'. In recognising this new form of Irish writing, Dillon began to question what the future held for her. She describes her efforts 'to pick up the craft of writing here, there and everywhere', from articles in English magazines, books and prefaces in classical novels, finding 'none of them useless but all of them unsatisfactory as a total guide' to her as a budding writer. She remembers her reaction to O'Faoláin's radio talks on the short story, broadcast in 1942, colourfully comparing it to 'the way an outcast member of the Foreign Legion would remember his first drink after he had crossed the desert on foot'. She imbibed the wisdom dispensed in these talks, much of it later published in 1948 in O'Faoláin's book *The Short Story*, which she describes as 'the best I have ever read on the art and craft of writing'. Dillon credits him with providing her with the 'whole philosophy that must order a writer's mind'. In him, she had discovered a role model and guide who could explain the production of a piece of writing as being 'wrested from the tensions' of the writer's life.[144] O'Faoláin went on to publish *The Bell* literary magazine in which he provided a platform for new writing and published stories and articles that measured up to his high standards of craftsmanship. Dillon describes how, as editor, O'Faoláin encouraged a whole new generation of Irish writers, 'teaching his craft to anyone who had the wit to listen', and she praises his 'unmistakably good advice' which was 'generously given'. However, her lack of confidence and her vulnerability regarding her education, remained significant. She expressed regret that this prevented her from submitting work to O'Faoláin. She wrote: 'I felt naive, primitive, conservative and traditional – shortcomings that I knew he was denouncing every month in *The Bell*'. In retrospect, she saw that it would have been a wonderful way 'to have bridged the awful gap of ignorance' which, she states took her 'ten years of practice and of the trial-and-error method'. Yet, she attributes the success she later achieved to having had O'Faoláin's principles fixed in her mind. His professionalism inspired her and fuelled her dogged determination, and she claims that his advice for writers to use the familiar as a starting point was instrumental in her choice of genre. She may have taken this counsel a bit too literally as seen in this explanation: 'Since I was scarcely more than a child myself, I wrote children's books. [...] I took them very seriously, using the basic techniques that I was learning so painfully, and found that they worked'.[145] Her choice of children's literature is only partially explained by Dillon's youth since other mitigating factors were at work in helping to shape her decision, most notably her personal inhibitions and fear of criticism. However, from O'Faoláin, she learned a work ethic, a sense of professionalism and an ambition that spurred her on, attributes that served her well. She recalls the benefits of his sound advice: 'Perhaps that was the ultimate thing we learned from him: to be disciplined, always to take the trouble to try, at least to make our work measure up to international standards, to expect to have it translated into every language, as indeed his is'.[146]

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[143] TS Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of TS Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975) 38.

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[144] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 37; 38; 40.
[145] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 40.

What Dillon failed to learn from O'Faoláin is perhaps even more important since she ignored, or was unable to accept, some of his other central messages, a factor which will be explored in Chapter Four. While he had been personally immersed in the nationalist cause at the beginning of the twentieth century, he later came to challenge what he saw as a sentimental notion of Irish history and rebelled against what he called 'the tyranny of tradition'.[147] His choice of words is significant to this dissertation since he identifies a tyranny in relation to historical memory, something he chose to part from, in contrast to Dillon who appeared to embrace it. O'Faoláin believed that the revolution had been sold to the world as 'a romantic thing', whereas 'it was behind the facade a realistic thing'. He was also of the opinion that, once nationalism had achieved its purpose, it was outmoded and unnecessary. He believed that the modern Ireland had to overcome its 'inescapable past' in order to answer the needs of 'the insistent present' and called on his memories to write in his short stories about the present, its social conflict, provincial frustration as well as its psychological growth, and spiritual discovery.[148] O'Faoláin shouldered the responsibility of addressing the conflicted soul of contemporary Ireland, something that Dillon, as illustrated in Chapter Four, could not, or chose not to, do.

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[146] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 41.

[147] Dan Mulhall, "Seán O'Faoláin and the Evolution of Modern Ireland," *The Irish Review*, 26 (Autumn, 2000) (Cork: Cork University Press) 24, 7 Mar. 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/29735988r.

[148] Mulhall 28-9.

Conclusion

WB Yeats declared that writers are 'moulded by influences that are moulding their country'.[149] However, the influences that played a part in forming Eilís Dillon as a writer were not contemporary but rather those that had shaped Ireland historically. Dillon, echoing Yeats, adds that 'people are largely moulded in their background', and this is particularly relevant to her own work.[150] While family personages were a source of great pride, their achievements must have weighed heavily on succeeding generations since there was, within the Dillon and Plunkett families, an expectation of industry and success. Dillon, having 'failed', as the family believed, in the education system and having been deprived of higher education, could not shine in the academic sphere, as she wanted. Instead, with great self-motivation, she sought to excel through her writing. Her determination to succeed in the career that she was forging may have been underpinned by an overwhelming need to prove herself both within her family circle and in the wider community of learning. Dillon, coming out from under the shadow cast by the achievement of others, struggled to establish her identity as a writer and chose to use personal and family memory, interlinked with the collective historical memory, as a means of defining herself as a writer.

Since some of her personal memories were painful, Dillon chose to focus on the larger picture of the Dillon and Plunkett families, and their national and international achievements, while also being selective in the eras that she chose to treat. As Valerie Krips remarks, people are never free of their past, but they are, however, 'fully capable of reimagining and renarrativizing it'.[151] Dillon, in an effort to re-make herself, confronted the 'ghosts' of her past, 'renarrativised' them and presented them to her readers, keeping them alive in fiction, rather than laying them to rest in historiography. She recreates the past in a way that is compatible with her own experience and conducive to a productive future, a process described by Lowenthal as follows: 'Through awareness of the past, we learn to remake ourselves. Through awareness of our own experience, we also refashion the past and replace what is all the time being altered and lost'.[152]

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[149] FSL Lyons, "Yeats and the Anglo-Irish Twilight," in MacDonagh et al. 214.
[150] Dillon, 33321, "Historical Novel" 2.
[151] Valerie Krips, *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage and Childhood in Post-War Britain* (London: Garland Publishing, Routledge, 2000) 15.

The landscape and the language associated with it were central features for Dillon within that remembered past. She confesses to being intrigued by this element of the writer's life, saying: 'It is a fascinating game, this one of finding out how much a man is influenced by his environment'.[153] It is equally interesting to attempt to understand the impact of one's native language on a writer's self-expression in a second language, particularly in a postcolonial context. Both of these aspects will be considered in Chapter Two.

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[152] Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place" 24.
[153] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks in Ireland" 35.

Chapter Two

Memory of Landscape and Language

Introduction

Eilís Dillon's deep attachment to Ireland's western seaboard and the language spoken there is particularly significant to her approach to writing. This chapter analyses, as central to her work, her romanticised recall of an older, and seemingly authentic, way of life from the perspective of individual memory and identity. It also addresses national memory and identity since the west, in a literary and artistic sense, bore iconic status, both as a source of inspiration and as a cultural repository for the nation as a whole.

Selected memories of a childhood spent in rural Irish-speaking Connemara in the west of Ireland provided an idealised background for Dillon's novels since her own links to that location were transformative. She explains, in particular, how the year that her family spent in Barna had strong resonance for her at a crucial stage of her early childhood development. She describes the freedom that she experienced there, the characters she encountered, the ballads sung to her by Irish-speaking housemaids and the fact that it was in this beautiful location that she first began at the age of seven 'to make up stories'. Despite living there for only a short time, and spending much of her life in urban centres, she recalled much later that the impact of Connemara 'was enormous'.[1]

Dillon's memory of Irish as she first experienced it as a young child brings a complexity to her relationship with the language and the ways in which she viewed it – first as an emerging author seeking publication in the late 1940s, and later as an established writer. This chapter chronicles Dillon's literary beginnings in that language and her change of direction towards writing in English, as well as her regard for Irish as means of expression. It closely examines the impact of Irish on her writing in general, discusses her skill and success as a translator, and also describes her efforts to make a classic Irish poem that is based on a tragic memory accessible, through translation, to a wider audience. Dillon's identification with the language embedded at an early age, her espousal of it for her early published stories for children, and her work in the area of translation, are all fundamental to an understanding of her status as an Irish author. For Dillon, the language as an expression of national identity places a responsibility on the writer to transmit to a general readership the strength and beauty inherent in it. This is a two-way relationship in that the writer also benefits, since, as Dillon asserts, memory of the Irish language, however unconscious, can afford a greater power of expression to writers in both Irish and English, leading them towards a unique literary excellence.

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[1] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 8.

Landscape Remembered

Dillon's mental revisitation of the landscape of her youth is neither unusual nor uncommon, and may even be beneficial and healing for the individual. It can be, as David Lowenthal explains, an essential curative element for 'the deadly disease of nostalgia', that overwhelming longing to revisit the past.[2] Returning, either physically or psychologically, can be a way of healing past ills but can also be a means of dealing with present realities. By going back to one's beginnings, to the place of one's childhood, people who are uprooted, disconnected, or living in 'an alien present', can be reassured.[3] When suffering from a general sense of loss or from displacement, the old familiar landscapes of remembered childhood can assuage the 'fear that the comforts of the past may be vanishing before our eyes'.[4]

The solidity of a landscape that is unchanged can affirm personal identity within any culture; as Yi-Fu Tuan states, 'man's place in the total scheme of things is not in doubt, because the myths that support it are as real as the rocks and the waterfalls he can see and touch'. This affirmation provides a sense of 'rootedness' and belonging, 'in both a psychic and a physical sense', while also providing understanding and clarity to existence, making the present more comprehensible and the future more secure.[5] For many people the 'geography of home', that 'half-remembered, half-fanciful landscape', can provide comfort, especially if they are distanced from their original situation, physically through migration, psychologically though disillusionment, socially through class or language, or politically through colonisation.[6] The permanence of place, in particular that of the unchanging rural landscape, can be 'reassuring to man who sees frailty in himself and change and flux everywhere'.[7]

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[2] The word nostalgia derives from the Greek words *nosos* – return to the native, and *algos* – suffering from grief. It refers to "the pain a sick person feels because he is not in his native land, or fears never to see it again." "Nostalgia," 5 Mar. 2011 http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Nostalgia.

[3] David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *The Geographical Review* 65.1 (Jan. 1975) 2, 15 May 2010 http://www.jstor.org/stable/213831.

[4] Lowenthal, "Past Time"1.

This sense of nostalgia is pertinent to a study of Dillon if, in Lowenthal's terms, we understand it as a sociological complaint, wherein the notion of return becomes 'a generalized sense of loss, focused less on the locality, than on the remembered childhood'.[8] Dillon's evocation of personal remembered landscape provided her not only with inspiration but also with a natural source of reassurance and creative security. In contrast to the disturbing early insecurity referred to in Chapter One, Dillon, in other references, remembers Connemara with fondness, both physically as a safe haven and temporally as a period of freedom, before the vicissitudes of adult life intruded. Having spent some of her formative years in the west, she expresses in her writing a sense of 'insiderness', of belonging to a specific landscape. The memories of the west stayed with her and she recalls quite clearly, or perhaps with the romanticism of hindsight, the beauty of Aran Mór island, its wind 'the sweetest and cleanest in the world', its sea 'as clear as rock-crystal'.[9]

Dillon also saw that era and landscape as a contrast to the rapidly-changing country that she experienced as the twentieth century progressed. She recognised the western landscape with its preservation of times past, its evocation of tradition, language, music and culture, as a *'milieu de mémoire'*, a precious environment enshrined in memory.[10] Dillon, like many other Irish writers she admired, among them Yeats and Synge, realised that landscape serves not just as a salve for personal wounds or as an antidote to sentimental longing, but also as a focus for nationalist feeling. As Lowenthal points out, the history of the landscape stands for 'durable national ideals' in every country, even those whose history is quite recent.[11] However, Ireland, with a history dating to antiquity and an accompanying tradition of heroic mythology, had a large store of motifs that enabled the development of cultural nationalism. In addition, with a troubled past of more than eight hundred years, it had no shortage of sites that retained the memory of battles fought and won, and of the courage of its people. There was no necessity to fabricate the equivalent of Nora's *'lieux de mémoire'* or sites of memory, since the memories were part of the very fabric of the land and were fixed in the lore of the people.[12] As Daniel Corkery asserts 'all the Gaels' were at one with the landscape itself and 'to recollect the place-names in certain regions was to remember the ancient tribes and their memorable deeds'. In the absence of such linguistic and nostalgic connections, the landscape would, in Corkery's view, become 'but rocks and stones and trees'.[13]

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[5] Gearóid Denvir, '"From Inis Fraoigh to Innisfree ... and Back Again?" Sense of Place in Poetry in Irish since 1950,' *The Yearbook of English Studies* 35, *Irish Writing since 1950* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 2005): 103–130, 108; 109, 13 May 2010 http://www.jstor.org/stable/3509328.

[6] Sally K. Sommers Smith, "Landscape and Memory in Irish Traditional Music," *New Hibernia Review/Irish Éireannach Nua* 2.1 (Spring/Earrach 1998): 132–144, 140, 15 May 2010 http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/new_hibernia_review/v005/5.2sommers_smith.html.

[7] Denvir 109.

[8] Lowenthal 2.

[9] Dillon, *Inside* 135.

The west, even more than the rest of country, had always been representative of this more Irish Ireland. The imaginative construction of that place was consolidated by Yeats and the Revivalists in their belief that particular expression should be given to the distinctive life of that location.[14] This, as Leersen points out, was part of an attempt 'to extricate the ideal of Irishness from a prevailing Europe-wide sense of decadence and degeneracy'.[15] Synge famously referred to the freedom of the Aran Islanders that allowed a simplicity of life in 'the absence of the heavy boot of Europe'.[16] Lowenthal articulates this uniqueness in his reference to the west as 'old Ireland' and in commenting that 'the saturations of time' rooted there seemed a far richer landscape than the English Pale, representative of the wider world and 'perched in its thin and isolated present'.[17]

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[10] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory*, University of California Press (Spring, 1989): 7–24, 7, 18 May 2010 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/2928520.

[11] Lowenthal "Past Time" 13.

[12] Nora 7.

[13] Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: MH Gill & Son, 1956) 56.
Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 24, cites Corkery as an enormous influence when she read his work at age 16.

[14] Yeats, in his Preface to "The Well of the Saints," urged Synge to leave Paris and go to the Aran Islands and, by living among the people and through his knowledge of the language, 'to express a life that has never found expression.'
Preface, "The Well of the Saints," *The Collected Works of WB Yeats Vol IV: Early Essays*, eds. Richard J. Finneran & George Borstein (New York: Scribner, 2007) 217.

The celebration of landscape in literature is widely recognised, particularly in the work of the nineteenth-century English Romantic poets – Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge and others – who viewed nature as a powerful force that interacted spiritually with those who observed it or depended on it for their livelihood. For these poets, nature was a means of seeking refuge in a simple and pastoral past that helped the individual to regain a sense of stability at a time of social upheaval and industrialisation. In the Irish context, and from a nationalist perspective, the notion of the land is, as Corkery states, 'one of the key notes of all Irish literature'. From the poetry of the seventeenth century to modern times, place has been a fundamental theme 'in a psychological, cultural and aesthetic sense'.[18] Locations referred to and recalled are 'never merely geographical spaces; they are points of origin, sources of values, territories of lived experience'.[19] They can also provide a permanence that proves elusive at times of political insecurity. The Irish Literary Revival looked to the landscape to provide the continuity that its founders craved. The *Gaeltacht* regions, the Irish-speaking areas of the west of Ireland, were seen as the repositories of an authentic Gaelic tradition and as 'an idylllic rural alternative to the "filthy modern tide" berated by Yeats'.[20] Writers recalled a long and glorious past as a means of understanding the country's new status, and the memory of that past and its nationalist ideals became ever more significant in a postcolonial era. As Simon Schama states, 'landscapes unique to each land, whether real or fanciful, participate in the creation of a national ideal, a national memory, and the idea of a nation itself'.[21] This is achieved not only by geography but by the active appreciation and interpretation of it by the people.[22]

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[15] Joep Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, Critical Conditions, Ser. 4 Field Day Monographs (Cork: Cork University Press 1996) 221.

[16] JM Synge, "The Aran Islands" (1907) *The Complete Works of JM Synge, Plays, Prose and Poetry*, ed. Aidan Arrowsmith (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2008) 324.

[17] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 48.

[18] Denvir 109.

[19] Eamonn Hughes, "Could anyone write it? : Place in Tom Paulin's Poetry," *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, eds. Colin Graham & Richard Kirkland (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999) 162.

[20] Denvir 110. This is a reference to "The Statues" by Yeats.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the west became the 'symbolic representation of all that is good in the emerging Ireland', an idealised *lieu sacré* or sacred place. In this literary tradition, the countryside is extolled for its physical beauty, in the 'most superlative of exaggerations: it is the most beautiful, the most friendly, has the loveliest rivers, mountains and the most fertile land'. But more than this, it is truly Irish, encapsulating the best of Irish tradition, culture and goodness. Writers look backwards with dual aspect, both in time and space which, as Gearóid Denvir highlights, is perfectly captured in the Irish word *siar* which can mean both westwards in direction and backwards in time.[23] In doing this, they recall a time of youth and can extol the place from which they are both physically and temporally distanced. Many Irish writers, among them Yeats, Synge, Kavanagh and Ó Direáin, had a strong affinity to place, and this tendency is still recognisable among the current generation of writers who identify with their landscapes of home. For poet, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, the landscape of the west possesses both identity and authenticity, and the writer's role is 'to inhabit and give voice to that identity'.[24] Eilís Dillon, in consistently enthusing about the remembered landscape, voiced that connection of the land to its people and their past. She believed that the Irish writer was blessed to be steeped in this landscape and was therefore well positioned to use memory and creativity to recreate it, in order to define the nation's cultural heritage and to maintain its presence into the future.

As a great admirer of both traditional Irish poetry and of poetry in the English Romantic literary tradition, Dillon was very aware of this established link between literature and landscape and of the conventions attached to it. Her adult novels, the majority of which are set in the west of Ireland, are filled with lengthy passages of hyperbolic, lyrical descriptions of land and sky, of stormy seas and crashing waves, that are typical within both traditions. Dillon clearly demonstrates this deep attachment to place in *Across the Bitter Sea*, when one character expresses the 'certainty that nothing could surpass the splendour of the blue Clare mountains seen from across Galway Bay on a fine summer's day, or the glory of a winter storm when the thunder and waves could be heard'.[25] Similarly, in many of Dillon's books for teenagers, the characters are bound to this preferred landscape. As the young protagonist Michael, referring to the island in *The Fort of Gold* announces: 'Anyone who came to Inishdara could see that it was the best place in the whole world to spend one's days'.[26] In a similar recognition of landscape, the son of the emigrant in *A Herd of Deer*, already imbued with a sense of the country's beauty, knew through stories narrated 'what the sunset was like there, and how the moon looks over a calm sea'.[27]

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[21] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995) 16.
[22] Sommers Smith 133.
[23] Denvir 110; 111; 111.
[24] Hughes 168.

Ireland's diaspora, particularly Irish-Americans, formed a significant part of Dillon's readership since thirty seven out of her fifty eight titles were published in the United States. For this audience she presented a memory of long-lost home, the birthplace of their ancestors, many of whom had emigrated at the time of the Famine. Dillon also helped to perpetuate a renewed sense of Irishness for an Irish readership when, at a time of rapid change and suburbanisation in the 1960s, they felt physically distanced and culturally separated from their roots. By continually depicting the unchanged and resilient coastal and island communities, with their reliance on the land and the sea for survival, Dillon presented a stable literary setting, seemingly as durable as the landscape itself. She appreciated her own connections with the west of Ireland and believed that such affiliation could provide essential inspiration for any artist, stating, 'I have no doubt myself that beautiful surroundings in childhood can have an effect that lasts the whole of one's life and that can provide inspiration at the early and most necessary stage when it is like the breath of life to an artist'.[28]

For her, Yeats epitomised the artist's bond with a particular location to place and she believed that his connection to the western county of Sligo was 'the greatest single factor in the awakening of that power that came to dominate his life, and which so enriched our literature'. In this, she created for herself a certain kinship with the poet who 'kept the feel of Sligo, and the inspiration of it, deliberately close by him all his life, to be taken out and savoured like old lavender from time to time'. The poet had been influenced by his mother's resentment at having to live in London and by her view that 'Sligo was more beautiful than other places'.[29] Yeats acknowledged his yearning for place as like 'some old race instinct, like that of a savage' and he longed for what became, in Kiberd's words, a 'dream landscape a never-never land to which it was hopeless to return'.[30] Dillon, as stated, was familiar with Yeats's early poems, which, lyrical and pastoral in tone, cemented this attachment to landscape.[31] She found solace or justification for her own reliance on place, in her contention that 'Yeats seems to have felt by instinct that it was dangerous for him to travel too far from the sources of his early inspiration'.[32] His strong association with Sligo seems to have vindicated Dillon in rarely straying from the scenes of her early life in the neighbouring County Galway, and in describing her beloved Connemara landscape, the power of the sea, and the peace and freedom of rural living. This, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, was an alternative to possible depictions of the modern Ireland.

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[25] Dillon, *Across the Bitter Sea* (London, Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973) 46–7.
[26] Dillon, *The Fort of Gold* 74; 103.
[27] Dillon, *A Herd of Deer* 19.
[28] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 35.

With some sweeping observations, Dillon cites examples of other writers and their knowledge of the west in order to provide further credence to her own deep affiliation to place. She remarks that one can see 'the power that the western landscape and its people exercised over Pearse's work',[33] and that Padraic Ó Conaire's writings also 'rose directly from this landscape'.[34] She notes that George Moore 'collected the material for his early novels, which are by far his best' from his time spent in Galway. Similarly, she recalls that Walter Macken loved the River Corrib and that 'the whole hinterland inspired most of his novels'.[35] She even asserts, without substantiating evidence, that the great tragedy in Oscar Wilde's life was to have been sent away from Ireland, the very place in which she believes 'his genius had flowered' and where he might have been further inspired, particularly by the west which he visited often.[36] Dillon was probably further encouraged by O'Faoláin's attachment to landscape that were, according to Maurice Harmon, 'the touchstones' of his 'sense of Irishness'.[37] Of his decision to return home to Ireland, O'Faoláin writes, 'We belonged to an old, small, intimate and much-trodden country, where every field, every path, every ruin had its memories, where every last corner had its story'.[38] Dillon had an even greater pastoral appreciation, but only in its application to the Ireland of her past and rarely as it related to the contemporary world. O'Faoláin, on the other hand, used this ancient landscape not just as a backdrop but also as representative of the cultural stasis of his times. He states: 'I wanted to write about this sleeping country, these sleeping fields, those sleeping villages, before my eyes under the summer moon'.[39]

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[29] Terence Brown, *The Life of WB Yeats, a Critical Biography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) 16.
[30] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland, The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996) 102.
[31] For example, "Crossways" (1889), "The Rose" (1893) and "The Wind among the Reeds" (1904).
[32] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 35; 35; 37; 38.
[33] Dillon, 33318, "Western" 4.
[34] Brown 16.
[35] Dillon, 33318, "Western" 5; 2.

Language Remembered

Séamus Tansey's words, describing traditional music and its links with the land, might equally be applied to the Irish language as another evocative form of expression:

> The law of the land is the geographical location of the countryside, be it mountain, valley, forest or plain. The wind, the rain, the flowing river that shapes the mind and passions of our ancient forefathers, inspiring them to harness all together the sounds of animals, minerals, birds and insects so as it moulded itself into a melody of Ireland's soul.[40]

Equally, landscape and language are inextricably linked in that the land cannot be separated from the sounds of the language used to name it. This sentiment is central to the Irish genre of '*dinnseanchas*', 'poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute what Seamus Heaney calls 'a mythological etymology'. Modern Irish poets, including Heaney, John Montague and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, continue to articulate the function of landscape in literature. Heaney describes how the shared, rich oral and literary tradition in Ireland makes its people 'inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind'. He speaks of the sacred nature of place, 'a sacramental sensing', which allows for 'the foundation of a marvellous or a magical view of the world'.[41] Montague also sees the Irish language as the key to reading and interpreting the landscape. Lamenting the demise of Irish in his native Tyrone, he expresses the loss incurred as a result of the absence of original place names, myths and legends: 'The whole countryside a manuscript / We had lost the skill to read / A part of our past disinherited'.[42] Ó Searcaigh, writing in Irish continues this metaphor, describing the land as *'duanaire mo mhuintire'* (the poem book of my people), *'an lámhscríbhinn a shaothraigh siad go teann / le dúch a gcuid allais'* (the manuscript they toiled at with the ink of their sweat).[43] By recalling landscape, writers aim to alleviate the alienation from place which occurs when original place names are lost through translation. As Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh explains, 'inherited historical narratives and communal myths'[44] start to disappear, along with what Denvir describes as the 'loss of a rich inherited matrix of wisdom and knowledge'.[45]

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[36] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 27.

[37] Maurice Harmon, "Seán O'Faoláin," *Selected Essays*, ed. Barbara Brown (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006) 62.

[38] Maurice Harmon, Introduction, *Seán O'Faoláin: A Critical Introduction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) xviii.

[39] Harmon, *Critical* xix.

[40] Sommers Smith 132.

Dillon supported the long held view that the Irish language, in embodying and preserving the traditions of the people, had always provided the essence of national identity.[46] Irish had, over generations, through story, song and poetry, maintained the crucial elements of national pride and a sense of belonging. It had also aided political resistance, since the language, through which nationalist thought and opinion were communicated, was unknown by the colonial power. However, as a result of demographic changes following the Great Famine of the 1840s and the prohibition against the teaching of Irish in schools until 1871, Ireland had very quickly become English-speaking, except in remote rural areas, particularly along the western seaboard. English was recognised as the language of opportunity at home and abroad, while Irish was the language of the marginalised and the dispossessed.

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[41] Seamus Heaney, "Preocccupations," *Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984) 131; 133; 133.
[42] John Montague, "A Lost Traditon," *Selected Poems* (Winston, Salem: Wake Forest Press, 1982) 108.
[43] Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Anseo ag Stáisiun Chaiseal na gCorr*, (19-21) trans. Gabriel Fitzmaurice, 20 May 2011 http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/11_16/poetry/senseofplace.shtml.
[44] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "Language, ideology and national identity," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, eds. Joe Cleary & Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 47.
[45] Denvir 122.
[46] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books for Irish Library" 1.

Yet, there was a lack of unity of purpose regarding the revival of the language which happened alongside the sporting and literary revivals of the late nineteenth century. On one side, purists like Pearse believed that the Irish language alone could save the soul of the nation, and allow native culture and tradition to be fully appreciated.[47] From a different perspective, the literary Revivalists, many of whom had little knowledge of the Irish language, set about the development of an English language literature that was steeped in Irish culture and mythology and was considered Irish in spirit, although expressed in the English language. As Seamus Deane explains, this group respected the language 'as a sort of romantic ruin, all the more attractive because it was clothed in nostalgic association', and its near extinction enhanced their view of it.[48] The struggle for predominance was voiced in strong terms by both sides in the language revival argument, although as Terence Brown states, the Free State Government of 1922, caught in 'a post colonialist society beset by manifold problems', was determined to restore the ancient language.[49] It was intended rather optimistically, as Liam de Paor states, that children should learn their ancestral language in the schools, allowing them to make contact with 'a world of ideas which was at once alien and mysteriously, intimately their own'.[50] This policy ignored the fact that Irish was no longer spoken by the majority of the population, nor by the Protestant minority who, except for a few, equated Irish with a peasant and backward tongue and as the preserve of Catholic nationalists. The task of reviving the language was mismanaged by placing the entire burden of Gaelicisation on the National School system which was expected to educate children to speak a language no longer used within their communities. Brown points to the futility of this approach in an era of great impoverishment, since 'the schools alone could not perform a linguistic miracle while the social order was undisturbed by any revolutionary energies'. There was a marked decline both in membership of the Gaelic League in the 1920s and in the number of Irish-speaking people in the country, a downward trend which continued for the remainder of the twentieth century.[51] It was against this complex backdrop of the Irish language revival that Eilís Dillon was born and educated, in a country grappling with its relationship to both languages but where 'the dream of an entirely Irish-speaking nation still existed' among a small number of enthusiasts, among them her grandfather and her own parents.[52]

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[47] Declan Kiberd, "Writers in quarantine? The case for Irish Studies," *The Irish Writer and the World* (1979) ed. Declan Kiberd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 53.
[48] Deane, *A Short History* 63; 73.
[49] Terence Brown, *Ireland – A Social and Cultural History 1922–2002* (London: Harper Collins, 2004) 3.
[50] Liam de Paor, "The Twenty Six County State," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 8 Dec. 1977.

Dillon's Background in the Irish language

Dillon's grandfather, Count Plunkett, while not a fluent speaker himself, actively encouraged the Irish language, co-founding the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, and bestowing, during his term in Trinity College, a gold medal for excellence in spoken Irish on a young Douglas Hyde.[53] Plunkett was also a founder member of the Dublin *Feis Ceoil* in 1897, a competition that focused on Irish musical talent.[54] Dillon's parents encouraged an openness to learning in all its forms and to the acquisition of a variety of languages, including Irish. It was an accepted family tradition that 'one should have at least some knowledge of the arts as well as of science'. Dillon describes her father as the embodiment of 'the complete man' and, in keeping with expectations of the era, he took courses in the classics and the liberal arts.[55] He held the Irish language, 'which he was very anxious' that the family 'should know well', in the highest regard, having learned it when he was a political prisoner in Gloucester Gaol. Indeed, he undertook his children's education in the language with such fervour that Dillon remembers:

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[51] Brown 49; 40; 51. Census figures cited by Brown show that between 1881 and 1926, the number of Irish speakers had dropped by 41%.

[52] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 10.

[53] Among other texts, the society published beginner books by Fr Eugene O'Growney aimed at the teaching of Irish.

[54] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 16–17.

[55] Dillon, 33320, "Able and Willing" 3.

'Until I was an adult, he never addressed a word to me in English'. Enthusiasm for Irish language and culture was communicated to Dillon and her siblings at an early age and she recalls that she absorbed the language 'without the smallest difficulty'. Many of Dillon's early memories in Galway relate to sounds:

> ... the cry of a grey heron taking off from the reeds; the roar of the wind in the tops of the pines; the swish of the boat through the rushes in the shallows; the crunch of the boat on soft gravel at the landing. And voices – not ours, but of the people in other boats.[56]

It is the voices of these local people, speaking their native language that made the greatest impression on the young Eilís. Sent to the small 'miserably poor' local school near her home at Dangan, she became immersed in the lifestyle and language of the place, and could proclaim that she spoke Irish 'like a native', since her schoolmates, as well as the nurses and maids employed by her parents, spoke only Irish and it was the sole means of communication with them.[57] Dillon recalls that her parents, in fervently supporting the national education system within the new Irish State, 'had come in for some criticism' regarding their children's attendance at that school. Family friends saw that it was cold, lacked sanitation and, more importantly, they believed that it would leave them open to 'consorting with dirty, sickly children' and to developing 'indiscriminate friendships' that would cause their cultured accents to suffer. Her parents' rationale, however, was founded on their faith in the independent Ireland, 'the new world they and their friends had created' and they 'were prepared to take the risk' on the children's behalf.[58] The young Dillons were, however, in contrast to their fellow pupils, privileged in being exposed at home to a broader education, through the music of Dvořák, the melodies of Thomas Moore, the voice of John McCormack and the literature of Shakespeare.

One 'glorious year' spent in Barna, just outside Galway city, at this critical time in her young life, allowed Dillon even greater freedom to interact with fellow

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[56] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 4.
[57] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 7; 6; 6; 7.
[58] Dillon, *Inside* 93.

Irish-speakers in the community,[59] and she and her siblings, unlike others of their social class, were encouraged to befriend families 'from the scattered cottages of the whole neighbourhood'.[60] This carefree existence was also culturally enhanced with visits to *Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe*,[61] the Irish Language Theatre in Galway, in which Dillon's parents were heavily involved. There, Eilís saw Irish translations of the works of Synge, Lady Gregory, Lorca, Molière and Shaw, which she remembered with great clarity.[62] Records show her parents' attendance at the opening *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* by Micheál MacLiammóir, the first play performed in the theatre in August 1928, along with the main figures within Irish political and cultural life of the period, among them Ernest Blythe and Lady Gregory.[63]

An account of Dillon's mother's time on the committee of the *Taibhdhearc* is interesting, since it shows Geraldine as the formidable woman she was. As costume mistress in the early years and treasurer from 1930, she became embroiled in political, cultural and personal disputes with other committee members. Geraldine Plunkett Dillon and Liam Ó Briain, who was Eilís's godfather,[64] both supporters of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, were perceived as 'Dublin blow-ins', 'who made much of their access to government ministers of the day', and as being over-assertive in their ambitious views in wishing to promote a vision for the theatre that would include translation of international works. By contrast, the chairman, Séamus O'Beirn, and other members, were in favour of a local folk theatre in which native Galway views should take precedence. Inevitable clashes ensued, ending with a greatly depleted committee.[65] Nonetheless, the young Dillons benefited from their parents' involvement and, from this early cultural nurturing, Eilís's engagement with, and love of, the Irish language remained a feature of her life and work, and an interest that she shared with her husband Cormac and their children.

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[59] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 6.
[60] Dillon, *Inside* 99.
[61] Seán Stafford, "Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe: Galway's Gaelic Theatre," *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 54 (2002): 183–214, 184, 1 June 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25573631.
Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe was founded in 1927, its name derived from the Latin 'theatrum'. Irish form from *taibhse* (ghost) and *dearc* (behold).
[62] Dillon, *Inside* 135.
[63] Stafford, "Taibhdhearc" 183–4.
[64] Dillon, *Inside* 136.
[65] Stafford, "Taibhdhearc" 188.

Dillon's Writing in the Irish Language

Dillon's relationship with the Irish language was a complex one. While obviously committed to the language, issues of publication were central to the stance she adopted at various stages in her career. By 1945, Dillon had already had stories in English rejected by British publishers and by an Irish educational publisher, Browne and Nolan.[66] The reader's report from the latter criticises her work for an 'absence of wonder and enchantment which appeal so much to the young imagination', further stating, 'indeed it is almost too competent and matter of fact for the young reader'.[67] Since there was little by way of indigenous general children's publishing in the English language in Ireland at that time, Dillon's options were limited. To her credit, the young writer did not dwell too much on these refusals as demonstrated in her use of the back of one rejection letter to write her shopping list.[68] Although this may be due to wartime thrift regarding paper, it serves as a reminder that, while trying to begin her career as a professional writer, she also had the duties expected of the full-time housewife to fulfil.

However, determined to be published, she used her memory and knowledge of the Irish language to good effect. Noting the shortage of books in Irish for young people,[69] she submitted stories written in Irish to the Government Publications Office, later *An Gúm*, a branch of the Department of Education.[70] While retaining a deep-seated fear of the critics,[71] she asserted that she chose to begin writing in the Irish language since it was spoken and appreciated only by a minority of people in the country, and 'seemed a good idea in the closed-in circle we lived in during the war'.[72] Its value lay in the fact that, since it was 'almost a secret language and certain to go unnoticed', it would afford her anonymity.[73]

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[66] Sir Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, Letter to Dillon, 21 Dec. 1945 on receipt of the book *The Magic Soda Cake*. Dillon Family Archive (DFA), Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Box 1.
Collins Publishers had also refused citing 'wartime difficulties'.

[67] Browne & Nolan, Letter to Dillon, Sept. 1945, DFA.

[68] Methuen, Letter to Dillon, 7 Nov. 1945, rejecting *Rabbit's House*, DFA.

[69] Dillon, 33319, "Writer" 9.

[70] The direct translation to English was "The Scheme".

[71] Dillon, 33319, "Writer" 8.

[72] "Eilís in Wonderland," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 18 Dec. 1972.

[73] Dillon, 33319, "Writer" 9.

While historically, writers had regularly used the Irish language as 'a sort of screen behind which they experimented' with more radical ideas, for Dillon, in a less radical field, it provided a shelter in which to practise her craft without placing her head too high above the literary parapet.[74] Writing for young children would also get her started in the less noticeable environment of children's literature and the even more limited one of Irish publishing.

Nonetheless, the road to publication was not easy and involved several years of correspondence, largely conducted in Irish, with her publishers. Dillon's letters from this time communicate a palpable frustration with the bureaucracy and time-wasting she experienced but also highlight her insistence on a quality end product. Although she submitted the manuscript of *An Choill Bheo* (*The Living Wood*) in 1945, the book did not finally appear in print until August, 1948. The intervening years were a lesson in hope, acceptance and perseverence. One reader-review was disparaging about her writing style, labelling it as being '*gan snas*' (without polish) and '*neamhchruinn*' (inaccurate) since she had mixed the dialects of the provinces of Munster and Connacht.[75] A second reviewer was more complimentary, declaring it as '*bríomhar, simplí*' (lively, simple) and, in terms of subject matter, '*go hionmholta tríd 's tríd'* [...] *so-leighte, éadrom, taithneamach do dhaoine óga*' (praiseworthy through and through [...] easily-read, light, enjoyable to young people').[76] The Publications Office finally contracted to publish, although stating thriftily that the price of the stamps used in sending the contracts to Dillon would be taken from royalties that would accrue.[77] Further correspondence continued between Dillon and the publications officer on various contentious issues, among them, the choice of artist and the payment that should be allocated to her. Similar problems and delaying tactics occurred with her two subsequent books: *Oscar agus an Cóiste Sé nEasóg* (*Oscar and the Six Weasel Coach*) (1952) and *Ceol na Coille* (*The Music of the Wood*) (1955).

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[74] Declan Kiberd, Introduction, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 14.

[75] Letter to Dillon, 14 Nov. 1945, DFA Box 1.

[76] Review included in correspondence. This writer's translation. DFA Box 1.

[77] Correspondence, 4 Feb. 1946, DFA Box 1.

In an effort to make these books more accessible, Dillon also sought to have *An Choill Bheo* recognised by *Coiste na dTéacs Bunscoil* (The Commission for Primary School Texts) as suitable material for the Irish National School Curriculum. However, once again, she was thwarted by policy and pedantry. Since her first book was written in 1945, before the issue of the *Litriú Caighdeánach*, (the prescribed standard for the school syllabus for the academic year 1950–1), it could only comply by being reprinted in the acceptable form, which, of course, was financially out of the question. Dillon, finding this attitude insulting since she was a fluent speaker, wrote to the Commission, pointing out that their policy did not 'encourage anyone who tries to make Irish books available for children'.[78] The enduring government policy of standardising the language was of questionable value since it neglected living dialects in favour of the artificiality of the imposed official standard.[79] The sort of Irish that Dillon remembered from childhood, learned from native speakers, was, as RA Breatnach points out, erroneously deemed by publishers as of insufficient level to turn 'native speakers of English into fluent speakers of Irish'.[80]

It should be acknowledged, however, that the stories about the lives of woodland creatures were reasonably well-received. A review in *The Irish Press* praises Dillon for her ability to understand the minds of the children, the animals that appeal to them and the 'correct' way to tell such stories to them.[81] Eilís Dillon had finally proved her competence as a storyteller in the Irish language, achieving a lightness of tone, a sense of fun and an imaginative flair in the invention of her anthropomorphic characters. In these early attempts, there was already evidence of some of the preoccupations that became part of her style. In *Oscar agus an Cóiste Sé nEasóg*, for example, Dillon creates a sense of mischief in the character of the determined young mouse who sets out to make his way in the world. However, even at this stage of her career, her propensity for didacticism and her desire for good behaviour is never far from the surface. Oscar is told to keep his face clean, to harm no one and to come home in the coach of his dreams. But above all, he must receive a good education since *'ní bhíonn aon rath ar éinne ná bíonn go maith chun na ceachtanna fhoghlaim'* (there is no luck for anyone who isn't willing to learn) and *'ní bhíonn aon mhaith in éinne ná bíonn an fhoghlaim aige'* (there is no good in a person who has no learning). As in many of her later stories, the main character encounters the Irish national characteristic of hospitality on his journey and is always made aware of his manners. Dillon's awareness of traditional storytelling modes are also evident in the addition of music and in the placing of Oscar *'fé gheasa'* (under a spell). The story finishes in a manner similar to many of the stories told by *seanchaíthe* (storytellers) in Ireland, and indeed in other cultures, with a direct address and a warning to the listeners of how to behave, should they be fortunate enough to come across the hero of the tale.[82] While the content of these books is clearly aimed at younger children aged six to eight, the standard of literacy required in the Irish language would, in this reviewer's opinion, preclude that age-group in a predominantly English-speaking environment from reading them without assistance. Dillon, therefore, even more than in her English language books, had to appeal to the dual audience of adult reader and listening child. She succeeds quite well since these stories are written in an idiomatic style of Irish, with a nod over the head of the child to the adult as the mediator of the text. What emerges is a tongue-in-cheek approach to storytelling that indicates the writer's own enjoyment in the process, an approach which she was about to transfer to her writing in English.

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[78] DFA, Box 1, Letter, no date.
[79] RA Breatnach, *Irish Quarterly Review*, 53. 209 (Spring 1964) 21, 15 May 2010 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/30088801.
[80] Breatnach 25.
[81] S. Mac S., Rev. *The Irish Press* [Dublin] 13 Jan. 1949, DFA, Box 1.

Dillon's decision to cease writing in Irish was linked in part to the inflexibility of her publishers and she notes that after 'three brushes with their obstructive policy', she directed her attention elsewhere.[83] However, this was not the only influential factor. In contradiction to her earlier stated ambition to write in Irish, she argues that, since it was not her first language, it was never her intention 'to write only in Irish'. Dillon was a pragmatist and recognised that by the 1950s 'Irish had served its purpose'.[84] With new insight, she now believed that a small Irish readership would limit her literary potential, would hamper her in attaining a foreign audience and, in an echo of her mother's aspirations for the *Taibhdhearc*, would prevent her from having her work judged by an 'international standard'.[85] With limited options open to her, since children's publishing was 'an almost unknown business in Ireland', and frustrated by the length of time it was taking for her Irish books to be published, she had, in the meantime, approached British publishers once again. Her first children's book in the English language, *Midsummer Magic*, was published in London by Macmillan in 1950. Encouraged by this, she sent *The Lost Island* (1952), which she regarded as her 'first *real* children's book' to Faber and Faber, at a time when they were 'frantically looking for material after the war' and she declared herself determined 'to stand or fall' by that attempt.[86] This marked the beginning of Dillon's career writing in English and a long association with a prestigious British publisher.[87] Ironically, no longer inhibited by the constraints of the *caighdeán oifigiúil*, she was free to use the Irish language of her childhood experience in an incidental way. She continued to articulate the Irish identity attaching to it, while, simultaneously, bringing colour and authenticity to her work and reaching a wider audience.

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[82] Dillon, *Oscar agus an Cóiste Sé nEasóg* (Dublin: Government Publication Sale Office, 1952) 4; 11; 15.

[83] Dillon, 33319, "Writer in Cork" 9.

[84] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 20.

Irish Language and Identity

Despite having been published in English, Dillon, writing in 1963, still maintained that 'the Irish language is an indispensible part of our cultural heritage', containing 'to a great extent the soul and spirit of our country'.[88] Believing, like Corkery, that 'without it Irish people could not express the vital life of their own country',[89] she asserts that it was essential to identity since 'it carried the traditions of the people and kept them alive'.[90] Dillon, in using the terms 'soul' and 'spirit', engages in what Breatnach calls the 'cloudy concepts' that imply the idealised superiority of the native speaker.[91] Indeed, it had often been suggested that ignorance of English among the rural people represented 'an unadulterated Gaelophone purity' and, when they ceased to speak Irish, led to a loss of that 'pristine purity, of virginal, unsullied, authenticity'.[92]

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[85] "Eilís," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 18 Dec. 1972.
[86] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 21; 23; 23.
[87] Dillon notes that she sent the document first to Macmillan who passed it on to Faber & Faber as it was more suited to their lists.
[88] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1.
[89] Brown 47.
[90] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1.
[91] Breatnach 25.

Dillon's view that knowledge of Irish was essential for all Irish writers, regardless of the language they adopted, provided a vindication and explanation that her commitment to the Irish language was not diluted by writing in English. She stated, in an acknowledgement of *dinnseanchas*, that 'place names, song and a proper understanding of our history' are 'a closed book to anyone who has not succeeded in learning something of the Irish language'.[93] More than that, in Galway, 'the perfect setting for a potential writer, intent on observing human nature in all its variations', a high level of fluency in Irish was 'the key to the countryside and to its people'.[94]. Viewing Irish as a linguistic passport to this local knowledge, she affirms: 'It is only through the Irish language that one can even now make contact with these people'.[95] However, her use of the word 'these' is telling, in that it betrays an understanding that, while she was able to communicate extremely well with the local people, she was not, and never could be, *of* them, due to her background and class.

The 'complicated two-way assimilative process' between the users of the two languages had been recognised as far back as the 1700s, and was epitomised by Jonathan Swift's need 'to acquaint himself with some Irish'.[96] A similar desire was also articulated by Yeats, who never mastered the Irish language but regretted the necessity to rely on work in translation. He stated, 'I might have found more of Ireland if I had written in Irish, but I have found a little and I have found all myself'.[97] Others managed through their knowledge of the language, and in their individual ways, to achieve a sort of fusion of both traditions. Somerville and Ross, with an understanding of Irish, demonstrated the development of a 'a powerful means of expression' in the capacity of the people to move from the speaking of

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[92] Joseph Th. Leerssen, AH van der Weel & Bart Westerweel, *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) 142.
[93] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1.
[94] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 1–2.
[95] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 4.
[96] Kiberd, "Writers" 53.
[97] Kiberd, "Writers" 53; 59.

Irish to a version of English, thus creating an invigorated hybrid tongue.[98] This distinctive form of expression, a result of 'transculturation' in Ireland, and which they describe as 'a fabric built by Irish architects with English bricks', permeates their work, often with comic appeal.[99] Synge, although with a knowledge of the language, wrote in English and similarly attributed to his characters a distinctive Hiberno-English dialect. Other writers, like Thomas MacDonagh, Austin Clarke, Brendan Behan, Liam O'Flaherty and Flann O'Brien, with their strong command of the Irish language, were able to express themselves successfully in both languages. O'Faoláin, although lacking 'a natural and inherent knowledge'[100] which would enable him to write fluently in Irish, felt strongly about it and had changed his name to its Irish version, believing that 'an Irishman without a knowledge of Gaelic is [...] intellectually and spiritually disinherited'.[101] Dillon, advantaged in her own knowledge of Irish, also promoted its value as something which, even when not spoken or understood, continued to underpin cultural thought and expression, and to define the way in which English is spoken in Ireland. Writing in the 1960s, at a time when Irish was largely confined to school curriculum status and as the language of the civil service, she explains its legacy: 'Irish is still a strong ingredient in the lives of the people of Connemara, even where it is no longer spoken. It shows in the pronunciation of place names, in the rhythms of speech and especially in the arrangement of words in a sentence'.[102]

The language, in Dillon's view, not only provided entry into the ideas and culture of the west but also gave lyrical expression to fine thoughts and ideas, in a manner that was vastly superior to that possible in English. Reaching back into her memory of Irish as it was spoken in her youth, she wrote that poetry was 'in the air in Ireland' and that Irish provided 'the colourful turn of speech which is commonplace', while also providing a 'feeling for words and imagery, especially among country people', which was 'quite unusual and striking'. She maintained that Irish endowed on the people of the west, the power to 'give a more vivid picture' of what they wanted to describe, 'far more comfortably' than in English.[103] However, as Irish people turned to English out of economic necessity, they began to speak it in a way that was particular to them, enhancing it with their translated version to suit the Irish temperament and turn of phrase. Dillon was an admirer of Lady Gregory's depiction of the locals of Kiltartan, believing that the writer had 'a specially keen ear for the speech of the people of her own district'. Aware that Gregory's 'Kiltartanese' and the English spoken in Synge's plays could sound 'exaggerated to many', Dillon asserted that such examples were in fact 'absolutely true to life',[104] and that the words 'pleasantly and politely fall on the ear'.[105] Synge had believed absolutely in the power of this 'Hiberno-English', calling it 'an art more beautiful than nature', and some of Dillon's characters speak with a resonance of his heroes.[106] One can imagine Máire Spartóg from Dillon's *The House on the Shore* mingling easily with The Widow Quin of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, when she says: 'You'll be above in Máire Spartóg's kitchen and you guzzling the potful of white cabbage, the lovely sweet red bacon and the bursting laughing potatoes and telling the company the great doings ye were at.'[107]

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[98] Julie Anne Stevens, *The Irish Scene in Somerville and Ross* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007) 122.
[99] Stevens 164.
[100] O'Faoláin, "About Myself," *Now and Then* 41 (Spring 1932) 35.
[101] O'Faoláin, "Gaelic The Truth," *The Bell* V (Feb. 1942): 335-40, 340.
[102] Dillon, 33318, "Western" 3-4.

Dillon made strong claims for the contribution of Irish to English expression, stating that, 'to this day, the Irish language and the special way of thinking that goes with it are only just under the surface of the English we speak in Ireland'.[108] With her affection for music, she analysed this evolution of the English language in Ireland, noting that:

> The metallic element was skillfully removed from it, the whole language was softened and certain words which strike hard on the ear were changed in their pronunciation and use. [...] This new language, which it is, was even more colourful and expressive than the parent one was.[109]

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[103] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 1; 2.
[104] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 25; 26.
[105] Dillon, 33318, "Western" 4.
[106] Kiberd, *Inventing* 303.
[107] Dillon, *The House on the Shore* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955) 199.
[108] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 2.
[109] Dillon, 33337, "Contemporary" 1.

Furthermore, she delighted in the love affair that she claims the Irish people have always had with language claiming, 'we love words for their own sake, for the very sound of them, used as if they were music, carrying the meaning through a barrage of vowel sounds and overtones in a way that seems not always to have much to do with their sense'.[110] Dillon saw this musical expression as a gift to Irish writers with 'the flow and cadence in it, the accent of the people as well as the choice of words' acting as 'an irresistible invitation to poet and playwright alike'.[111] She believed that knowledge of the second language gave them an even greater advantage, in that it cleared away clichés and led to the precision and clarity which she saw as a distinguishing mark of Irish writers in general.[112] This viewpoint is supported in Flann O'Brien's correspondence with playwright Seán O'Casey, when he agrees that every writer who uses English with imagination, owes a debt to the Irish language whether he can speak it or not, since as 'an inbred thing' it supplies that unknown quantity that allows writers to transform the English language.[113]

Dillon pointed out that although Samuel Beckett did not understand Irish, his work is 'sprinkled with turns of phrase that are wholly Irish', under the surface of the dialogue in English. His characters reveal themselves in a type of speech in which 'a great deal of fun [...] comes out of the contrast between austerely classical English and the everyday version of the language'.[114] Ó Cuilleanáin, identifying a similar trait in his mother's work, with its emphasis on conveying accurately the particular way in which English was spoken in Ireland, and with repeated efforts to recreate a past era, refers to 'the ghostly presence of the Irish language, which underlies much of the speech patterns in her books'.[115] This ghostly presence, along with those of her Plunkett/Dillon ancestors, was to haunt much of her literary output.

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[110] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 24.

[111] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 26.

[112] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 20.

[113] Kiberd, "Writers" 63.

[114] Dillon, 33326, "Beckett's Irishness" 7–9.

[115] Cormac Ó Cuilleanain, "Growing up in a writer's head," *Treasure Islands – Studies in Children's Literature*, eds. Mary Shine Thompson & Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) 204.

Postcolonial Pragmatism

Dillon, in her approach to and use of Irish, presents a dilemma typically experienced by the artist in postcolonial cultures in struggling for literary identity across two languages. Since language can be seen as the 'medium through which a hierarchical structure or power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of truth, order and reality become established', it is central to the coloniser's efforts to control.[116] In a bid to find 'a national signature',[117] the former colony uses language to assert its culture and as a means to construct 'difference, separation, and absence from the metropolitan norm'.[118] In an Irish context, where skin colour was not a mark of difference, language became one of the few ways of distinguishing the colonised from the coloniser. Irish language enthusiasts, at the end of the nineteenth century, had recognised the language as 'the fount of a hundred inspirations', providing for the young 'a thousand new cords binding them to their native country'. It was the distinguishing feature, a way of reminding the population that Ireland was, as described by DP Moran, a strong proponent of Irish cultural distinctiveness, 'an entity of original and historic growth, not a parasite stuck on the side of England'.[119]

The loss of the Irish language as a viable alternative to English brought about a crisis of identity, an erosion of the sense of self, and a lack of ability to express effectively ideas and emotions which were natural in Irish, yet unsatisfactory in English. Raja Rao, writing of the Indian colonial experience, articulates this kind of loss:

> One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien' yet English is not really an alien language to us. It

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[116] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin eds. *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* (London & New York: New Accents, Routledge, 2002) 7.
[117] Edward W. Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, eds. Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson & Edward W. Said (Minneapolis: A Field Day Company Book, University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 81.
[118] Ashcroft et al. 43.
[119] DP Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (first published in *New Ireland Review, 1898-1900*) ed. Patrick Maume (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006) 26; 29.

> is the language of our intellectual make-up [...] but not of our emotional make-up.[120]

This problematic attempt to make the second language fit into established social and cultural traditions, and in particular, to emotional and imaginative expression, was a predicament which was to 'inspire and torment' writers for generations.[121] Many critics[122] appositely draw attention to Joyce's character, Stephen Dedalus, who describes English as 'an acquired speech', declaring that 'his soul frets in the shadow' of that language.[123] Despite the difficulties of adapting to a new language, writers in a postcolonial context continuously struggled to make the English language express their life experience to the imported or imposed tongue. Through a process known as appropriation, the adopted language is then adapted to the emotional needs of the colonised. It is, as Rao states, made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience or to 'convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own', as well as the writer's thoughts and ideas. For most writers in Ireland, there is the sense of overlap of language, when 'texture, sound, rhythm and words are carried over from the mother tongue to the adopted literary form'.[124] It is appropriate to see Dillon in this postcolonial light, given her knowledge of Irish and her consciousness of the linguistic gap which remained – even a generation later.

However, with the same practicality that Dillon applied to her publications, she understood the need for English as a language of commerce and development, and writes, 'In my own lifetime I have seen how, as the country progressed economically, gradually the use of English became more common'. She accepted that 'an international language is a necessity',[125] and saw the learning of English, perhaps as Ó Tuathaigh describes, as 'an essential enabling state on the path to progress and civility'.[126] Kiberd, more dramatically, sees the espousal of English in the historical context as 'a desperate bargain made with modernity', in its preparation of children 'for emigration, commercial life or higher education'. Writers, seeking to further their careers and gain a wider audience, made their own bargain with the English language since, economically, it was foolish to forsake a career in English for the more frugal rewards of Irish.[127] The power and accessibility that English could offer writers was inestimable and Dillon was appreciative of the benefits of Ireland's former colonial status, since it had provided 'an invaluable benefit in the English language with its vast and wonderful literature'.[128]

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[120] Ashcroft et al. 60.
[121] Ó Tuathaigh 46.
[122] For example, PJ Mathews in Hooper & Graham, *Irish and Postcolonial Writing* (2002) 113 and Declan Kiberd (2005) 39.
[123] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1st ed. 1916) This ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1975) 189.
[124] Ashcroft et al. 24; 38; 51.
[125] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 22.
[126] Ó Tuathaigh 45.

It is perhaps in her demonstration of 'linguistic hybridity' or integration of the two languages that postcolonial features are most obvious in Dillon's writing. This hybridity allows for what Mikhail Bakhtin declares as 'the illumination of one language by means of another'.[129] Dillon was rigorous regarding the authenticity of the way by which her characters spoke and very often resorted to the Irish remembered from her childhood to present most accurately their manner of speaking in English. She described the process as follows: 'when I doubt as to how the people of the Galway sea-coast spoke, I thought first in Irish and then in the careful, classical English that those people use'.[130] Synge, and others, also used this technique of returning to the first language in order to find adequate expression in the second. Writer George Moore, who had his collection of short stories *The Untilled Field* translated from English to Irish and back again,[131] found that his writings were 'much improved after their bath in Irish'.[132] Dillon understood this approach and, by her daughter's account, often engaged in this practice of first writing dialogue in Irish and then translating it into English, to provide authenticity of expression.[133] The English spoken by former Irish speakers manages to retain the idioms of Irish, as well as many of its grammatical features such as the use of the continuous present. Dillon also peppers the characters' speech with untranslated Irish phrases, in particular, with blessings, endearments and with words that have no exact English equivalent. Characters regularly greet each other with *beannachtaí* (blessings) taken directly from Irish such as 'The blessings of God on you. May you all come safe'.[134] They address each other as '*agrá*' (love), or sometimes use derogatory terms such as '*scalltán*' (rascal). Place names like Inisthorav or Bull's Island,[135] while written in an English form, are taken directly from the Irish pronunciation. Dillon refrains from glossing the Irish words, that is, giving their translation in brackets after them.[136] To do so would be to give English a higher status than Irish. In postcolonial terms, leaving words untranslated can be seen 'as a political act', a means of expressing the otherness of those who still understand Irish, and a way of maintaining an element of power and an assertion of difference and identity by excluding the outsider.[137]

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[127] Kiberd, "Literature and Politics," in Kelleher et al. 25–6.
[128] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1.
[129] Mikail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holdquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 361.
[130] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 23.
[131] *The Untilled Field* (1903) was published in Irish as *An tÚr Ghort* (1902).
[132] Kiberd, "Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party," *The Irish Writer and the World*, 91.
[133] Ní Chuilleanáin, Interview.

Dillon's characters sprinkle their speech with Irish phrases but, by carefully contextualising them, the author conveys their meaning to the non-Irish speaking reader. For example, in *A Herd of Deer*, Sarah John says, 'Oh, that was a great *gaisge*, you'll be the talk of the town'.[138] From the context, we understand that '*gaisge*' is a great deed of some sort. Similarly, in *The Fort of Gold*, when Old Katta shouts at the horse, 'We'll give you túirne Mháire', we grasp that '*túirne Mháire*' is a threat of a beating.[139] Dillon uses this device cleverly throughout her work to denote insider knowledge and she supplements it with allusion to familiar terms known only to locals. She refers to a 'gug' for an egg, 'a creepie stool' for the fireside stool, '*brochán*'[140] for thin porridge and '*spartóg*' for hair like mountain grass.[141] In both her children's and adult novels, the characters who can speak Irish are portrayed in a kindly light, as people who have a special understanding and who are privileged to know the hearts and minds of the people. For example, Peter Morrow, the protagonist in *Across the Bitter Sea*, educated and well-travelled but anxious to keep his affinity with the Irish language, is depicted as careful to dress as a local when visiting his relatives, so that people would speak Irish more easily with him.[142] Dillon also infers that a deep wisdom accompanies knowledge of the language and that it offers a way of talking over the heads of non-Irish speaking strangers in order to get the better of them. For example, the young boys on a dangerous errand in the children's novel, *The Seals*, are saved by the woman of the house who sings a message to them in Irish, in full view and hearing of English soldiers who cannot understand a word.[143] This much-used literary trope, as employed by Dillon, is common in a postcolonial context. Critic Michael Cronin explains this as the 'duplicity of translation' when the native language is used as a subversive activity as a means of frustrating the intelligence-gathering activities of the coloniser and of maintaining control of local knowledge.[144]

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[134] Dillon, *The Seals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969) 11.
[135] Dillon, *The Coriander* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963) This ed. (Dublin, Poolbeg Press, 1992) 7; 115; 127.
[136] Dillon *Across.*
[137] Maria Tymoczko, '"What ish my Culture? Who talks of my Culture?": Interrogating Irishness in the Works of James Joyce,' *Irish and Post Colonial Writing, History, Theory, Practice*, eds. Glenn Hooper & Colin Graham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 181.
[138] Dillon, *A Herd of Deer* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969) 96.
[139] Dillon, *The Fort of Gold* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1961) 17.
"Túirne Mháire," Potfocal, 'to give a trouncing,' 21 July 2010
http://www.potafocal.com/Search.aspx?Lang=ga&Text=tuirne+Mh%C3%A1ire.
[140] Dillon, *San Sebastian* (Faber & Faber, London: 1953) This ed. (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1996) 43.
[141] Dillon, *The House on the Shore* (Faber & Faber, London: 1955) 81.

Issues of Translation

Emer O'Sullivan identifies Eilís Dillon and Patricia Lynch as the two writers who 'almost exclusively flew the Irish flag' of children's literature internationally until the 1990s. Dillon's books were particularly popular in Germany where her name is linked to Heinrich Boll and his wife Annemarie Boll who translated her work 'out of affection for Ireland'.[145] Dillon was enthusiastic about having her books presented in numerous languages, stating: 'For me, a book would not be a success if it could not be translated into every language under the sun'.[146] However skilful the translator, difficulties inevitably arise in maintaining the Irish language presence in the text when books are translated into a variety of international languages as Dillon's were. An experimental comparison of Dillon's *Island of Horses* with *l'Île des Cheveaux*, its version in the French language, yields interesting results.[147] The translation is faithfully worked, and the sense and adventure of the story are well conveyed. The Irish context remains dominant as place names and character names are rarely given in French, although their pronunciation must at times pose a challenge to the foreign reader. Obviously, the Irish phrases have to be translated as it would be confusing for French-speaking children to have to cope with unglossed words from a third language mixed into the second one. Occasionally, by using colloquial French, the sense of a rural atmosphere is maintained. However, there are difficulties in getting particular Irish local phrases across, for example, 'a loaf of soda bread' becomes '*un miche de pain*' (a loaf of bread), 'a mug of tea with a sup of poteen in it' becomes '*un bol de thé au whisky*' (a bowl of tea with whiskey) and 'the settle bed' becomes '*la banquette*' (a wall seat). Nor is there an adequate translation of the diminutive form common in Irish. For example, 'a tasteen of that bit of bread', is merely '*gouter un peu*' (to taste a bit). This leads to a general flattening of the language and an inevitable removal of its local essence. The description of the crickets in front of the fire illustrates this very well. In the original, 'the crickets came out to do their step-a-kipeen on the hearth', while the French version, reading as, '*je les entendais crisser sur la pierre*' (I heard them scraping on the stone), is much less poetic.[148] Although she was certainly fluent in French and Italian, it is not clear whether Dillon critiqued any of the translations of her own books as they were being published. It is certain, however, that she had a keen interest in the process of translation itself and saw it as a worthy and enjoyable academic pursuit, and one into which she put tremendous effort and time.

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[142] Dillon, *Across* 194.
[143] Dillon, *Seals* 103.
[144] Michael Cronin, "History, Translation, Postcolonialism," *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, eds. Simon Sherry & Paul St Pierre (Ottawa University Press: Ottawa, 2000) 38.
[145] Emer O'Sullivan, "Irish Children's Books in Translation," *The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books*, eds. Valerie Coghlan & Celia Keenan (Dublin: CBI, 2000) 128–9.
[146] "Kay Kent talks to Eilís Dillon," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 5 Mar. 1974.

Translation is an important means through which a postcolonial population can access the earlier works of its original language, providing, what Ó Tuathaigh describes as, 'a complex portal between language and cultures'.[149] It can provide 'an accessible vantage point from which one can witness with probable regret, the vanished or vanishing world' of one's forebears.[150] Dillon, with her keen sense of retrospection and awareness of the past, was drawn to this work and used it skilfully to revive one of the greatest poems of the Irish language. The important role of the translator is not to be undertaken lightly if, as Roger Caillois reasonably asserts, to translate well is to 'invent the text, vocabulary, syntax and style that the translated author would have written if his native language had been that of the translator and not his own'.[151] Eilís Dillon was undaunted by the enormous challenges presented by translation and, having seen her grandfather's success in this area, she valued it highly as an art form. As previously noted, she had translated some of Yeats's poetry into French, and later translated an Italian play by Ignazio Silone into English.[152] She also found her translation skills and knowledge of Latin were 'very useful' during her seven years serving as a member of the International Commission for English in the Liturgy, established in 1963, after the Second Vatican Council.[153]

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[147] Dillon, *The Island of Horses* (Faber & Faber, 1956) This ed. (Middlesex: Puffin, 1976); Dillon, *l'Île des chevaux*, trans. Huguette Perrrin & Nicole Rey (Paris: Nathan, 1968).

[148] Dillon, *Horses* 10; 11; 13; 138; 156. Dillon, *Chevaux* 11; 13; 221.

[149] Ó Tuathaigh 55.

[150] Ó Tuathaigh 56.

While enjoying the intellectual athletics involved in translation, Dillon also viewed it as an educational tool for both reader and writer. It was a means whereby the Irish literature of the past could be introduced to a new audience, who would otherwise be denied access to it. In addition, she perceived it as useful in casting 'an oblique light' on work that is familiar. Moreover, she saw translation as 'a labour of love' and urged that the translator should choose an author as they would 'choose a friend'.[154] Showing in-depth knowledge, she analysed in some detail the work of translators she admired, among them, Douglas Hyde, who, by translating Irish poetry, was able to demonstrate 'what a treasure it was', could 'reveal to the English-speaking Irishman that a long and honourable tradition existed', and that there was material of 'a most exciting kind' to be drawn upon.[155] Dillon also considered the art of translation as being of value to the poet, noting that Thomas MacDonagh 'worked his apprenticeship' by translating old Irish poetry. She speaks of his 'uncanny knack of translating it into English almost word for word and keeping the rhythm of the original at the same time'. Stating that this 'is no mean feat', she praises his faithfulness in adhering to the spirit of the poems by 'choosing the word with the best flavour to express the feeling of the original'.[156] Equally, she believes that many translations by writer Frank O'Connor were 'first class work', and she highlights his ability to reproduce the spirit of the original and to understand '*why* each poem had been written' as being 'the mark of a good translator'.[157] O'Connor, like Dillon, saw it 'as a necessary duty to translate' earlier literature in order to make it known both at home and abroad, thereby lifting 'the cloak of time' to give the reader access to the Gaelic Irish tradition.[158] Dillon had an enduring interest in Irish poetry, especially that written by, or ascribed to, women, and she writes with authority about it. She describes the "Lament of Creide for Dinertach", which dates from the sixteenth century, as an 'authentic and a well-shaped poem', written in *debhidhe*, or seven-syllable lines in rhyming couplets. She explains these points with quotes from her own translations of "Dónall Óg", a long, lyrical poem from the eighteenth or nineteenth century, previously translated by Lady Gregory. She also, with a rare incursion into mythology, translated elements of *Duanaire Finn*, a collection of middle and early Irish poems with verses 'spoken' by the legendary Diarmuid and Gráinne.[159]

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[151] Seán Ó Tuama, *Repossessions: Selected Essays on the Irish Literary Heritage* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995) 228.

[152] Silone, *As it was in the Beginning*, 24 Mar. 2010 http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/01.Biobiblio.html.

[153] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 39.

[154] Dillon, 33344, "Publications Reviewed by Dillon," Rev. of Poetry Books, 17 Aug. 1989.

[155] Dillon, 33337, "Women" 4.

Translating the Lament

Dillon's most famous translation was of "*Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*" ("The Lament for Arthur O'Leary"), a poem or chant belonging to the tradition of the *caoineadh* (keen), composed by relatives in honour of a dead person, and which was part of the elaborate ritual of the Irish wake or celebration of the dead. It has been noted by Peter Levi that 'undertones and fragments' of this form are found in many traditions worldwide and 'probably in all epic poetry'.[160] In Ireland, the *caoineadh* was practised primarily by women, as a form of ritualised lament since the twelfth century, and involved a heightened expression of personal emotion.

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[156] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 28.

[157] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 2.

[158] Alan Titley, "The Interpretation of Tradition," *Frank O'Connor: Critical Essays*, ed. Hilary Lennon (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) 10 July 2010 www.four-courts-press.ie/cgi/bookshow.cgi?file=foc_essay.xml.

[159] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1; 2; 4.

[160] Peter Levi, Inaugural Lecture, *The Lamentation of the Dead* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1984) 15.

The role of the *sean bhean bhocht* (the poor old woman), was in later centuries integrated into nationalist narratives with the *bean chaointe* (keening woman) as representative of oppressed people bemoaning not only individual suffering but also communal hardship and national suppression. This trope was explored by Pearse, Yeats, Lady Gregory and other Revivalist writers. [161]

"Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire" is, as poet Vona Groarke describes, 'a touchstone poem' in the tradition of the *caoineadh*, and one which has enthralled its devotees for generations. Groarke believes that its impact is powerful and that it is impossible 'to be an Irish poet and not be aware of its existence'.[162] The work has undergone numerous translations or part translations by notable literary figures among them Frank O'Connor, John Montague and Thomas Kinsella.[163] Each translation is a further effort to capture, in English, the essence of the poem; a woman's expression of the extremes of love and despair for her dead husband. During the 1960s, when Dillon realised that she was omitting this important work from her lectures about the poetic tradition in Ireland because she believed, despite earlier efforts, including O'Connor's 1940 version, that 'no good translation existed', she decided to attempt it herself and worked for several years in perfecting and completing it.[164]

Dillon had been deeply affected by this poem by Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill when she first read it at the age of fifteen, and fifty years later recalled with clarity the significant effect that it had had on her: 'The impression was so strong that I remember exactly where I was at the time'.[165] Her reaction is understandable when we take account of Seán Ó Tuama's view that 'the human tenderness (in the original Irish poem, at any rate) is beyond praise and beyond tears'. The four hundred line lament is described by Ó Tuama as both a 'remarkably literary utterance', while also 'an extempore' statement of grief by Eibhlín Dhubh Ní

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[161] Kathryn Conrad, "Keening the Nation: The Bean Chaointe, The Sean Bhean Bhocht and Women's Lament in Irish Nationalist Narrative," *Irish Literary Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Patricia Coughlan & Tina O'Toole (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008) 39.

[162] Vona Groarke, Interview by Vincent Woods, *The Arts Show*, RTÉ, Radio I, 9 June 2008.

[163] Other translations by Prof. Kenneth Jackson, Brendan Kennelly, Paul Muldoon and Vona Groarke.

[164] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 8. Dillon's translation was first published in the *Irish University Review*, Spring 1971, partially reprinted in *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974) and in *The Penguin Book of Women Poets* (1978). Reproduced in full: Peter Levi, *Lamentation* (1984).

[165] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 8.

Chonaill on the murder of her husband during Penal Times in 1773. He sees it not only as 'a powerful dramatic lyric but also as an absorbing documentary of a tragic happening, [...] not just a defence against death, against distress but one of the greatest affirmations in literature of a woman's love for a man'.[166] Alan Titley believes that this 'oral artifact [...] survived beyond all those countless thousands of other laments because of the force of the poetry and the tragedy of the story'.[167] It is also, according to Deane, a work of memory, since the author, in an outburst of grief at the murder of her husband, 'remembers everything about him and each memory sharpens the pain' – a pain that through its translations can be felt across the generations.[168] Dillon had a particular affinity with the poem as a work of recollection but also identified with it in other ways. She admired the poem as having 'the one essential of a true work of art', in being 'a spontaneous expression of an emotion which is the central inspiration for the whole work'.[169] The "Lament" was also the work of a 'strong assertive woman' who, as a member of the O'Connell family of Derrynane, would have used English in daily life, but chose the Irish language for this poem of personal grief and anger at the English perpetrators of injustice.[170] In addition, Dillon may have seen an association with its subject, since Arthur O'Leary, a Catholic, had, like many of Dillon's ancestors, fought in the service of a foreign army.[171]

While both Titley and Ó Tuama emphasise that the written poem emerged from the oral tradition, they, like Dillon, understand that it was not actually impromptu. The poem had been composed when the body was being re-interred in a family plot and subsequently was developed over time in a more structured way than other oral renditions, making it a more accomplished composition. Dillon's translation was based on Ó Tuama's edition of the poem, which she viewed as the most authentic Irish version, since it had been faithfully transmitted into literature from renderings by the keening woman Norry Singleton on two occasions, the first in 1800 and again in 1870.[172]

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[166] Ó Tuama 99; 78; 82; 100.
[167] Titley, "Interpretation" 6.
[168] Deane, *History* 26.
[169] Dillon, 33332, "Poetic" 9.
[170] "The Lost World of Art Ó Laoghaire," *Documentary on One*, RTÉ, Radio I, produced by Aidan Stanley, 14 Feb. 2007 http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/artoleary.html.
[171] Arthur O'Leary, a captain in the Austrian Army, was shot on refusing to sell his horse to Abraham Morris, the High Sheriff of Cork, which according to the Penal Laws, he was required to do.

Dillon's confidence in approaching "The Lament for Arthur O'Leary" was boosted by her knowledge of how English was spoken in Cork and Kerry, a manner of expression that was 'by no means dialect, nor [...] a kitchen language', but 'a colourful, flexible use of English' whose 'source is unmistakable in Irish'. She believes that without this knowledge, gained from many years spent in Cork, she 'could not have attempted to reproduce the spirit of the original'. Titley points to the difficulty of the task for any translator of this work, not just because of 'the fact of its being spoken, or rather sung, or chanted or wailed, but the fact of its being torn from its natural surroundings of death and performance'.[173] Dillon paid great attention to the form of the lament, believing that 'the intensity is magnified by the form, which is what gives the poem its power'. In examining its structure, she talks of the special rules or conventions applied to the composition of a *caoineadh*, which included 'praise of the hero's exploits, his generosity', 'gentleness suddenly turning to harshness', the inclusion of a number of speakers, a sequence of several parts and the different functions of the rhythms.[174] "The Lament for Arthur O'Leary" adheres to all of these with particular eloquence. The sequence is clear in its movement from lamentation at the death, the quarrel over the wake, the lamentation before the initial burial and then to the final two stanzas devoted to the re-interment. Dillon captures the essential element of remembrance in the poem with the widow recalling the first time she met Arthur O'Leary and subsequently eloped with him:

> My friend forever!
> My mind remembers
> That fine spring day
> How well your hat suited you,
> Bright gold-banded,
> Sword silver-hilted –

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[172] Ó Tuama 87.
[173] Titley, "Interpretation" 15; 8; 6.
[174] Dillon, 33337, "Women" 3.

Right hand steady –
Threatening aspect –
Trembling terror[175]

Dillon disliked O'Connor's translation in particular, because he had lengthened the line. She deemed this 'a pity', as it seemed to her 'that the short line is an essential part of the style'.[176] Indeed, it produces a more flattened and prose-like effect, for example when he writes with less pace, 'How your hat with its band/Of gold became you'.[177] The rhythm of the lament, conveying movement through various actions and moods, is regarded as being at the heart of the poem, causing the work to be described by Groake as 'a hoof beat through Irish poetry'.[178] The picture of Arthur O'Leary as captured by Dillon in her English version, ably evokes the impressive figure that he made cantering through the town and contains the essential movement of the dashing figure:

The Saxons bowed to you,
Down to the ground to you,
Not for the love of you
But for deadly fear of you,
Though you lost your life to them
Oh my soul's darling.[179]

In addition to the mood of the poem, and indeed wishing to convey it properly, Dillon saw that the technical intricacies were of great importance. While believing that 'technique should always be at the service of art', she felt that it was the mark of a good poet to be able to adhere to such rigid rules[180] and that it was the duty of the translator to maintain the original flavour of the poem by including as many of the technical elements of the original as possible. She was critical of those who had previously attempted translations of the "Lament", stating that none of them seemed successful 'mainly because they all failed to follow the rhythms of the original'. Since, in her view, these are 'an essential part of the poem', she 'laboured long and hard over a six year period, to get them right', completing it in 1971.[181] Dillon expressed huge regard for the skill of the Irish literary poets, and details their dexterity in syllable-counting and in use of metre, in their employment of internal rhyme and alliteration, in their attention to regularity in the syllable number of the word-endings, and in the way they place stress on the final, or sometimes on the penultimate, syllable. With respect for this expertise, she closely follows the rules of the original and shows awareness of the different functions of the varying rhythms, sometimes used for admiration, but also for passionate anger, as expressed by the various characters speaking in the poem. She notes that the first four stanzas of the original text describing the handsome Arthur O'Leary share similar metric structure in having two stresses to each line, whereas stanza five which deals with the poet's distress at the prospect of telling her children of their father's death, has three stresses in each line to express her anguish. Dillon adheres strictly to this metre in her translation. Titley endorses Dillon's view stating that O'Connor 'solves the metrical problems by simply ignoring them', which was a mistake since the feeling within the poem 'resided in the perfection of the technique'.[182] Although there are definite similarities and any differences appear subtle, there is individuality of technique in each of the translations and a particular simplicity of expression in Dillon's version. While O'Connor took certain poetic liberties, in particular with the terms of endearment used, Dillon translates them directly as the writer intended them in Irish, maintaining their expression of love and loss in the rhythmic double affections, for example: 'My friend and my love' (*Mo chara is mo stór tú*), 'my love and my treasure', (*Mo chara thú is mo shearc-mhaoin*) and 'my friend and my lamb' (*Mo chara is m'uan tú!*).[183]

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[175] Dillon, "Lament" III (1–9).
[176] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 18.
[177] Frank O'Connor, *The Lament for Art O'Leary, A Frank O'Connor Reader*, ed. Michael Steinman, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1994) 237.
[178] Groarke, RTÉ.
[179] Dillon, "Lament" III (13–18).
[180] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 3.

Given Dillon's skill and love of translation, it is notable that she did not attempt to translate, as O'Connor did, that other great eighteenth-century poem, Brian Merriman's "*Cúirt an Mheán Oíche*" ("The Midnight Court")[184], described by Ó

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[181] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 35.
[182] Titley, "Interpretation" 6.
[183] Dillon, "The Lament for Arthur O'Leary," in Ó Tuama 88–100.
[184] Frank O'Connor, *The Midnight Court* (London: M. Fridberg, 1947).

Tuama as 'a magnificently bawdy *jeu d'esprit*'.[185] The content of this poem is very different and involves the women of Ireland putting their men on trial for being sexually timid. Far from a lament, it is according to Titley, 'funny, bawdy, explicit, dramatic and intelligent' in tone. It is probable that Dillon avoided translating this poem since the more *risqué* topic would not have appealed to her, and since any translation of it, would inevitably cause the sort of debate which O'Connor 'jumped into with his two feet flying and his two fists flailing'.[186] Terence Brown confirms this enthusiasm, seeing it as a 'direct denunciation of contemporary Irish sexual mores' and as a deliberate rebuke by O'Connor 'to a censorious society'. The response was predictable with O'Connor's translation and its references to 'willing wenches' and 'lusty thews and thighs' being 'promptly banned'.[187]

If, as Lisa Lowe believes 'every good translation originated in simple and unpretentious love of the original', then Dillon's work can be judged as very good indeed, because her admiration for the work is unconcealed.[188] Eilís Dillon's deep understanding of the essence of poetry drew her to "The Lament for Arthur O'Leary", which she saw not only as a 'direct release of tragic feeling' in which 'the energy and forthrightness are quite spontaneous',[189] but one which was brought by virtue of its emotional intensity in Ó Tuama's words to 'another dimension, the dimension of poetry'.[190] A sort of symmetry can be found in the fact that in his work, *Recollections,* he included Dillon's translation as the most faithful in the English language.[191] Ó Tuama's stated aim is to maintain the greatest possible fidelity of content and to convey all images and ideas of the original Irish. This inclusion by a renowned Gaelic scholar is a tribute to Dillon's skill and accuracy as a translator, and to her ability to transmit the spirit of the lament. She had previous recognition for this work when Peter Levi, Professor of Poetry at Oxford,

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[185] Ó Tuama, Preface to *An Duanaire* (Portlaoise: Dolmen Press 1981) xxix.
[186] Titley "Interpretation" 6.

[187] Terence Brown, "Frank O'Connor and a Vanishing Ireland," *Frank O' Connor Essays,* ed. Hilary Lennon (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) 45-6.
[188] Lisa Lowe, "Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of Dictée," *Gender and Colonialism,* eds. Timothy P. Foley, Lionel Pilkington, Sean Ryder & Elizabeth Tilley (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995)
[189] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 18–19.
[190] Ó Tuama 99.
[191] Ó Tuama 99.

'was fired with great enthusiasm both for the poem and the translation'.[192] Describing it as 'the greatest poem written in these islands in the whole of the eighteenth century', he chose to read Dillon's version at his inaugural lecture in 1984.[193] Dillon's comment, that 'it was very interesting and gratifying to know that a poem which means so much to us in Ireland could cross the barriers of nationality', gives credence to the notion that it had been among her original aims in translating the poem to afford it the exposure and attention it deserved, and to ensure that this poem about memory would be retained in national and international memory into the future.[194]

Conclusion

Dillon's intense relationship with the remembered landscape of the west as representative for her as a *lieu sacré* embedded in the past, became a defining feature of her work. With nostalgic attachment, the location was for her a model for positive expression of national identity. It retained an essential goodness in its place names, the memory of previous generations, their hardships and struggles and their affinity with the land and the sea - all set in sharp contrast to a developing and more materialistic Ireland, beginning to look outwards.

Dillon's equally strong relationship with the declining Irish language that she had learned as a child, is also evident in her capacity to deal with the tensions between English and Irish as dual forms of expression. However strong this identification with Irish, Dillon, with a pragmatic approach, recognised its limitations in allowing her to achieve critical acclaim, popular success in Ireland and her desired international recognition. Nonetheless, she maintained her interest in Irish, using it to underpin and illuminate her depiction of an older and more authentic Ireland. In addition, Dillon's instinctive understanding of Irish poetry, rooted in the oral tradition from which it sprang, with its emotional spontaneity and evocative language, compelled her to re-engage with "The Lament for Arthur O'Leary", one of Ireland's greatest poetic treasures, and to complete her highly-regarded translation of it. Given the approval that she gained for this work and her obvious talent in the area of translation, it is surprising that Dillon did not pursue this talent in a more concentrated way with other poems. Perhaps, once again, the limited audience for such work was a restrictive factor.

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[192] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 35.
[193] Levi, *Lamentation* 18.
[194] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 35.

Dillon's dual preoccupation with the language and landscape of her youth became hallmarks of her writing, upon which she came to rely and, at times, over-emphasise. However, if these remembered links were deeply embedded in her from an early age, she expressed even more vehemently her attachment to the people she recalled fondly from her life there, as well as their disappearing traditions and lifestyle. By placing the young protagonists of her children's books within their western communities, Dillon focuses on the dignity and nobility of the people who belonged in that sacred place. This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three

Memory of a Childhood, Memory of a People

Introduction

Dillon's retrospective gaze within her fiction for children is examined in this chapter, both in relation to the author as an adult writer revisiting the books of her childhood, and to children as readers in creating and accumulating new memories. The chapter will provide an overview of Dillon's output while referring to a representative sample of her novels for children. It will also place Dillon within a tradition of children's literature in Ireland contrasted against a limited indigenous publishing industry. The author's approach to writing is assessed by considering the writers she emulated, her own views on suitable literature for children, commentary on her work in reviews and critical essays and, in particular, through close readings of her texts. Dillon's reliance on her own background for material, as well as her tendency towards didacticism, are appraised with reference to a wide range of texts for various age groups. Her success in writing for these various audiences is also assessed, as is her waning popularity as new authors emerged in the 1990s who were promoted within a developing Irish publishing industry.

Dillon's adoption of the adventure genre, and her particular adaptation of it to suit an Irish context, is examined in the light of developments within children's literature in Ireland and as it relates to childhood itself. Understanding the potential of books to influence, inspire and especially to educate, Dillon, through her stories, sought a means of informing a new generation of young readers about a way of life and a people she so clearly recalled. She chose to employ what was considered to be the teenage adventure novel as a didactic tool to convey to a new generation her own memories of the island communities, their traditions, customs and values, as well as her personal belief in the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in post-revolutionary Ireland. In particular, she wished to transmit to young people the sense of confidence that would be needed for their own future and that of their country. Dillon's novels are examined with reference to the emotional growth and search for identity expected of protagonists in this type of story. The unresolved tension between Dillon's evocation of past events, particularly in *The Seals* and *The Children of Bach*, and her failure to engage to any great extent in children's historical fiction in other works, will also be addressed as arising from her personal memory or need for cultural amnesia.

Eilís Dillon's 'firm ideas of what children's books should be about' derived from memories of her earliest childhood reading and the influence of the books she read as she grew into adulthood.[1] Her strong convictions about the suitability of books for children, and more explicitly, those for Irish children, the standards that she applied to them and the character of child readers themselves, all provide clues to the criteria that she set for herself in her writing. Her belief in the book as a learning experience, both in terms of literary appreciation and content, and in its power to inform, is particularly significant in defining her didactic approach across a range of texts. Reference is made in this chapter to books that are representative of the three categories into which her work is segregated. Dillon wrote thirty-seven books of children's fiction: eight books for young children, fourteen books for eight to twelve year olds and fifteen books for teenagers.[2] In addition, she wrote two non-fiction books, stories for anthologies, as well as many unpublished drafts that are available in manuscript form.

The main focus of this chapter is on Dillon's work for teenagers since these novels are concerned with the themes on which she concentrated most, and on which she elaborated simultaneously in her work for adults. The term 'teenage books' needs clarification because, although aimed at the teenage readership of the time and featuring teenage protagonists, Dillon's books are unlikely to appeal to a more sophisticated modern audience, now more usually described in publishing terms as 'young adults'.[3] Robert Dunbar explains that teenagers today would find the world that she depicts as 'really very alien' and would consider her work as quite dated.[4] There are inevitably some overlaps between books for the various age groups, for example, *The Sea Wall* and *The Voyage of Mael Dúin*, although aimed at eight to twelve year olds, fit thematically within the 'teenage' collection and will be referred to as such.[5]

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[1] Robert Dunbar, Personal Interview, 15 Oct. 2008.
[2] Dillon, Writing http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.
[3] All but two of these books were published between 1952 and 1969.
[4] Dunbar, Interview.

Remembered Reading, Recommended Reading

In a lecture to a group of Irish librarians in the summer of 1963, Dillon recommended suitable reading for Irish children in particular.[6] Her suggestions, based on her own reading experience and presented as a reading list, would today be viewed, as they possibly were even then, as exceptionally demanding and beyond the reading ability and comprehension of most modern children.[7] Declan Kiberd, notwithstanding his strong literary background, recalls that when given this list by Dillon for his own children in the 1980s, he was surprised by the very demanding nature of its contents.[8]

Dillon's memory of her early contact with literature may have allowed her to presume that similar precocity in reading was the norm. The Dillons set high standards in that 'anyone who could not read by the age of four was looked on with a certain amount of impatience'. The author's belief that she came 'late' to reading at the age of five, and was thereby considered by the family as 'in the doubtful class indeed as to intelligence', may account for some of her views.[9] In her lecture, she expresses an urgency to get children started, to establish that crucial relationship with books at an early age, 'to arouse interest, real interest, before the vulgarities of the world get hold of the children and make it impossible to read at all'. This implies that some realities could be avoided since the child could find refuge within books, as well as a goodness and truth that could not be found elsewhere. According to Dillon, there was no time to waste since, 'at the very moment a child is old enough to read it, a book should be available; a day, a week later may be too late'.[10] This underlying philosophy explains why, although popular with older children, Dillon continued throughout her career to write for emergent readers.

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[5] Dillon, *The Sea Wall* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965); Dillon, *The Voyage of Mael Dúin* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969).

[6] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books for the Irish Library," Lecture to librarians, Summer 1963.

[7] Dillon's reading list appears as Appendix C of this dissertation.

[8] Declan Kiberd, Personal Interview, 1 Feb. 2011.

[9] Dillon, *Inside* 87–9. Dillon claims that she could read *The Tinder Box* by Hans Christian Andersen at the age of five.

[10] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 9.

For Dillon, suitably chosen books were key instruments in the broader artistic education of the child, since they have the effect of clarifying the understanding. Simultaneously, 'the child should be taught to look for the quality of artistry in everything he reads' and 'learn to watch for the answering reaction in his own mind and to use it for his own development'. With this emphasis on meta-cognition in reading, Dillon seems to play down the element of enjoyment. She concedes, however, that there must be 'something immediately attractive about a book to enable it to take hold of the child's imagination, entering the mind, giving it pleasure and intensifying whatever experience is taking place there at the time'. Only authors of the highest calibre should be chosen, for example, Oscar Wilde[11] and Robert Louis Stevenson for their 'elegant choice of language'. Dillon also deems the use of imagery as 'one of the infallible signs of an artist', and in a comment written in the margin of her notes, she adds: 'By the way, this standard cuts out people like E. Blyton'.[12] Although an author who also chose island settings and adventurous exploits for her storylines, Enid Blyton's rather formulaic but enormously popular writing did not allow, according to Dillon, for 'fixing a sense of good taste', which she saw as a great consideration in the choice of children's reading material. Strangely, as a writer of many adventure stories for children, Dillon advocated that a child should learn never to read a book 'for the story', stating that this is a 'poor approach'. Her own ambition for children's literature was a more lofty one. For her it was essential that the child's mind should be opened to all sorts of literature and she warned against making the mistake that 'ignorance is protection', since it was more likely to be the reverse. She asserted that children could cope with a wide range of material and that she had never known a book that was a true work of art to 'injure a child's mind'.[13] Kiberd explains that Dillon's opinion was based on the belief that children could selfcensor and filter out material that they did not understand, but that they were, nonetheless, empowered by having access to the wider field of literature.[14]

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[11] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 19. Dillon, claiming that 'people were nervous about having children read Oscar Wilde,' countered this by saying: 'We are not sending our children to play with him – we are only giving them his books to read.'

[12] Enid Blyton (1897–1968) was a popular British author of more than 600 books for children.

[13] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 16.

However, Dillon could be contradictory with regard to these convictions. As co-editor of *The Lucky Bag* book of short stories,[15] she objected strongly, as evidenced in letters to fellow editor Peter Fallon,[16] to the inclusion of James Plunkett's (no relation) story, *St Patrick and the Snakes*, describing it as 'too brutal for children' and as having 'nothing to do with their lives as lived at present'. Dillon, ever cautious, writes that although there ought to be a certain amount of truth and realism included for children, 'one doesn't give them a liqueur after dinner either'.[17] She proclaimed that while the work in question was a 'fine story', she could not stand over presenting it to children to read, since 'the utter ugliness of some aspects of life are too destructive' for children to have to confront.[18] She was so adamant about this point that she threatened to withdraw from the project if the story was included in the book.[19] The episode is interesting in demonstrating that, while Dillon professed liberalism in suggesting certain books, she also exercised extreme reticence about what should be made accessible to children. She admits that it is 'no harm to harrow a child's feelings judiciously' in order to 'develop sensitivity' but that this should not be overdone.[20] Dunbar recalls her conservatism and, in particular, her expressions of shock at the content of some teenage publications of the 1970s, notably in Robert Cormier's novels with their sexual references, which Dillon regarded as intrusive and unnecessary.[21]

While in the aforementioned reading list, she promoted the work of the great British writers like Shakespeare, Kingsley, Milne, Dickens, Kipling, Ballantyne and Lewis Carroll, Dillon had other particular requirements for reading material suited to Irish child readers.[22] In her introduction to *The Lucky Bag*, she makes a sweeping claim that Irish stories were, by their very nature, superior reading for the Irish child:

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[14] Kiberd, Interview.
[15] Eilís Dillon, Pat Donlon, Patricia Egan & Peter Fallon, eds. *The Lucky Bag* (Dublin: Lucky Tree Books, The O'Brien Press, 1984).
[16] Peter Fallon was contacted for this study but had no documentation relating to this issue.
[17] Dillon, Letter to Peter Fallon, 2 Mar. 1984, DFA, Box 1.
[18] Dillon, Letter to Peter Fallon, 28 May 1984, DFA, Box 1.
[19] Dillon, Letter to Peter Fallon, 18 May 1984, DFA, Box 1. Peter Fallon expressed surprise at the 'vehemence' of Dillon's views. However, some agreement was reached, as the story did not appear in the collection.
[20] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 1; 12.
[21] Dunbar, Interview.

> One thing they have in common is that they are Irish, and that means that they are good stories, in the sense that you will never be bored by them. In Ireland we all love a good story, whether it be about ghosts and magic and strange, inexplicable happenings, or about the ordinary doings of everyday life.[23]

However, for Dillon, the function of Irish literature went beyond mere storytelling. She considered texts dating from the early part of the twentieth century as being very appropriate, since they contain 'the sense of wonder and delight which overwhelmed writers at the time of their composition'. Dillon advocated that this material 'should be the Irish child's first introduction to the literature of his country' and believed that the child, although at an early stage of understanding, could connect with these works because 'racial memories are still at work in him'. The implication is that 'sensitive' Irish children, through a form of imprinted national memory, can absorb via literature a reverence for tradition, while simultaneously appreciating that they themselves are 'the descendants of an old aristocracy, which had a long tradition of scholarship and literature'. Dillon echoes the Revivalist belief that to fail to introduce the finest Irish writing is to 'leave the child in the intolerable situation of not knowing the literature of his own country', and, by implication, the values that it imparts.[24]

Although she strongly recommends knowledge of Irish folklore through the work of Jacob, Colum and Stephens, she suggests, more significantly, a number of texts that overtly promote nationalist ideals and patriotic fervour.[25] Included among these are Alice Curtayne's *The Irish Story*, which Dillon claims is 'patriotic without being blind to our national feelings', and John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, since 'a child who can read this at eleven or twelve is an Irishman for life'.[26] While Mitchel's work inspires nationalist sentiment, it also makes for disturbing reading for young people, with its vivid descriptions of Ireland's poor, 'starving wretches' who were 'skeletons at their own hearths'.[27] This choice seems at odds with Dillon's previously noted objection to the inclusion of harrowing scenes. She also considers *The Rising* by Desmond Ryan, as essential reading since, as she states, 'the Civil War has made us self-conscious in Ireland about instructing our children in patriotism'. The term 'instruct' underlines an intended didacticism. Again, with a view to the education of young people, she endorses Frank O'Connor's *A Book of Ireland* for its 'panoramic view of our literature and history' and its ability to awaken all kinds of new interests.[28] Dillon, steeped in a nationalist literary environment, extrapolates that all Irish children should be encouraged, and indeed taught, through literature to absorb the same sense of patriotism.

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[22] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 21.
[23] Dillon et al. *Lucky*, Introduction.
[24] Dillon, "Irish Books" 27.
[25] Dillon, "Irish Books" 4; 5; 27; 15. Dillon recommends *Celtic Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs (1892), Padraic Colum's *The King of Ireland's Son* (1916) which she sees as 'a blue-print for all Irish folklore stories,' *Irish Fairy Tales* (1920) by James Stephens for their humour and pathos and the *Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1958), as well as Yeats's poems for their appeal to the senses.

Dillon's need to recall the books of her past is easily justified in Valerie Krips's explanation of the dual function of children's literature. The adult, in looking back, hopes not just to recover a nostalgic 'mirage of a golden age' but also to gain personal insights. Because 'the books of childhood are in a special phenomenal relation to the world and one's experience of it', they conjure up past images and impressions, while also eliciting emotional and intellectual responses from an adult perspective.[29] As Francis Spufford points out, the books that people read as children 'become part of the history of our self-understanding' and are, as a result, engrained in memory. He explains: 'We can remember readings that acted like transformations [...] times when a particular book, like a seed crystal, dropped into our minds [...] and we suddenly changed'. Spufford's summary of how books open a world of endless possibilities to the young reader is evocative in its clarity:

> The books you read as a child brought you sights you hadn't seen yourself, scents you hadn't smelled, sounds you hadn't heard. They

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[26] Dillon, "Irish Books" 9; 10.

[27] John Mitchel, *The Jail Journal or Five Years in a British Prison* (New York: Office of the 'Citizen,' 1854) 16, 20 Jan. 2011 http://books.google.ie/books.

[28] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 11.

[29] Krips, *The Presence of the Past: Memory,* 23–4.

> introduced you to people you hadn't met, and helped you to sample ways of being that had never occurred to you.[30]

Krips expands on the fact that the children's book is peculiar in its temporal reference to both the present and the past, to memory and the promise of a memory. The childhood book satisfies nostalgia but, as a tangible artefact or *objet de mémoire*, also triggers memory and returns precious or significant moments to the adult.[31] Dillon also believed in the deeper function of reading in adding significance to life's events, maintaining that books carry a meaning lying below the surface that need not be explicit or understood.[32] She also identifies the comfort that can be found in children's literature and, in some of her adult novels, there are instances of grown men finding solace in the books of their childhood. For example, John, in *The Head of the Family*, 'soothed himself into a fit state for sleep with a children's book', while Miles, in *Sent to His Account*, reading *The Wind in the Willows*, found that 'the book was soothing and he fell asleep at last'.[33] Dillon recognises that children's books should, while inducing children 'to read of landscape or a moonlight night or a summer dawn', also appeal 'to the memories (that) older people have of these same things'.[34] This may be seen as a mirror image of the consolation that Dillon as an adult writer found by recalling her childhood in her books for a child readership. Although she had some unhappy memories of that earlier time, it is not unusual to bathe even difficult events in a more kindly light, as she tended to do. Halbwachs excuses the inevitability of turning back to any past experience, however disturbing, because it 'exercises an incomprehensible attraction to the person who has survived it and who seems to think he has left there the best part of himself'.[35] He argues that, as memory is altered, adults persuade themselves by means of 'a retrospective mirage [...] that the world today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past, in particular regarding our childhood and youth', when possibilities were limitless and cares were few.[36] This carefree atmosphere pervades much of Dillon's work for children.

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[30] Francis Spufford, *The Child that Books Built* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002) 9; 10.
[31] Krips 24.
[32] Dillon, 33340, "Reviews 1960s-90s". Newspaper cutting undated.
[33] Dillon, *The Head of the Family* 113; *Sent to His Account* 110.
[34] Dillon, "Literature in a Rural Background", *14th Loughborough International Conference on Children's Literature* (Trinity College Dublin, Proceedings, 1981) 7.
[35] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* 49.

Dillon's recommended reading list seems to form part of a natural pattern of recall but Kiberd sees it differently. His belief is that 'there was an element of compensation about the list', a wish to prove Dillon's own familiarity with world-class literature, in spite of her lack of third-level education.[37] There was also the sense that, through her extensive knowledge of books, she could educate others. With an element of superiority, she asserts that there is 'a highly intelligent but ignorant population' in Ireland, and notes that 'an educated child is quite safe with a book, but the ignorant parent is afraid to let him have it'.[38] However, by rooting her choice of reading material so much in her past and by including so many books from an earlier era, Dillon fails to cater adequately for the reading interests of the target child audience of 1963 – boys and girls who were entertained by British detective, school and modern adventure stories. Dillon's attitude to such material and her failure to recognise its popularity is illustrated in her objection to an RTÉ broadcast in 1970 of one of the *Greyfriars* series of books.[39] The response from the broadcaster, although sympathising with Dillon's point of view, indicates that she 'may perhaps be over-estimating the amount of damage which stories like the Billy Bunter series can do'. The letter further points out that the majority of young listeners see these books for what they are, 'pieces of entertainment, which have only the most tenuous relation to real life'. In a further comment, and a possible gibe at Dillon and other Irish writers, the respondent states that RTÉ saw the need 'to balance the schedules with some light-hearted material', since Irish writers catering to the 12 to 16 year age group 'rarely write humourous work'. The communiqué further states that 'despite their apparently foreign surface and period flavour', the books were 'extraordinarily popular' with young readers in Ireland.[40] In objecting to, and ignoring, the reading preferences of great numbers of young Irish readers, and in focusing on more challenging earlier works, Dillon was setting an impractical aim for the librarians she had addressed some years earlier.

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[36] Halbwachs 48.
[37] Kiberd, Interview.
[38] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 26.
[39] *Greyfriars School Series* by Frank Richards, pseudonym of Charles Hamilton (1876–1961).
[40] Dillon, 33337, Máire Nic Eoin, Letter to Eilís Dillon, Drama and Variety Dept. RTÉ, 20 Jan. 1970.

Children's Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland

In her recommendations, Dillon bypassed many Irish publications from the middle decades of the twentieth century, possibly because, as Valerie Coghlan states, 'little of any lasting consequence was published for children in Ireland'. The country's period of economic difficulty was 'paralleled by an atmosphere of moral and religious conservatism and a desire to look inward'.[41] The oppressive, stagnant, uncomfortable social environment can, as Caitriona Clear contends, be succinctly conveyed in 'the three words, "de Valera's Ireland"'.[42] The era was marked by 'a sort of leftover Victorian prudery and moral pedantry', while remaining in the grip of the intensely conservative Irish Catholic Church.[43] Although adult literature developed considerably, particularly through the short story which was often seen as a retort to this oppression, children's literature remained static. A consequence of the narrow-minded outlook that prevailed was that the small number of children's publications were 'consciously didactic', many of them 'moralizing booklets' approved by the *Catholic Truth Society of Ireland* on the basis of 'religious, national and educational factors' and which focused on stories of the saints, or on retellings of legends of ancient Ireland.[44] Dillon asserted that there was some benefit to this material in giving Irish children an advantage when approaching literature, since 'their religious instruction makes philosophers of them at quite an early age'.[45] The Talbot Press was notable in that it aimed to publish work by Irish authors which could be marketed internationally, although it too was cautious in its choice of material.[46] The company asserted that authors were given the widest scope but with the proviso 'so long as the novel is clean and wholesome'. Mary Flynn describes its approach towards children's literature as 'top-heavy with control'.[47]

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[41] Valerie Coghlan, "Looking Forward, Looking Back," *Childhood Remembered: Proceedings from the 4th Annual IBBY/MA Children's Literature Conference* (Roehampton: National Centre for Research in Children's Literature [NCRCL] Papers 3, 1998) 164.

[42] Caitriona Clear, "Women in De Valera's Ireland 1932-48: A reappraisal," *De Valera's Irelands*, eds. Gabriel Doherty & Dermot Keogh (Dublin: Mercier, 2003) 104.

[43] Jeremy Addis, "Children's Publishing in Ireland," *The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books*, eds. Valerie Coghlan & Celia Keenan (Dublin: Irish Children's Book Trust, 1996) 164.

[44] Valerie Coghlan, "Faith and Fatherland: The Influences of Church and State on Publishing for Children in Ireland in the Mid-Twentieth Century," *Children's Literature Global and Local: Social and Aesthetic Perspectives*, eds. Emer O'Sullivan, Kimberley Reynolds & Rolf Romaren (Oslo: Novus Press, 2005) 149; 154; 152.

[45] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 16.

Both educational and Irish language publishing thrived during this time, the former because the large school market guaranteed substantial sales and the latter due to the fact that *An Gúm* was a government-owned publishing house.[48] Dillon was supportive of educational publishing since she remembered during her early schooling, the introduction of the first reading material aimed specifically at the Irish child. She recalls the 'physical relief' for the children of the west when they encountered stories that were meaningful, in contrast to irrelevant English material about the 'impropriety of going without a hat'.[49] However, there continued to be little mainstream publishing for young people and 'material for young children was largely neglected and possibly even avoided by publishers'.[50]

The general lack of publishing for children can be explained to some extent by economic factors but, even more so, by the 'very low status accorded to children in Ireland'. Due to economic hardship, many children in impoverished Irish families were forced into work at an early age, and little value was placed on reading for pleasure in poorer households, nor within the prescribed narrow curriculum in national schools. As Coghlan states: 'In general, attitudes to books were utilitarian', being aimed only at intellectual and spiritual development, and literature that celebrated childhood was not seen to be of huge importance by educators, publishers, clergy or politicians. Such attitudes pertained through the 1950s and 60s when Church precepts were still rigidly observed, and independent thinking was seen as 'a threat to the hegemonic hold of Faith and Fatherland'.[51] In contrast to the dismissive mentality towards literature for young people, Dillon herself, coming from a literary background, had very happy memories of reading as a teenager, as did her daughter Eiléan. The latter, having grown up in the 1940s and 50s, but in an encouraging environment, speaks of 'happy reminiscence of a time when reading for pleasure was an inexplicably approved indulgence', an ideal experience that Dillon presumably intended librarians to replicate for all Irish children.[52]

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[46] Mary Flynn, "The Talbot Press: An Investigation into the Contribution to the Publication of Children's Literature in Ireland, and an Assessment of the Influence of Children's Literature on the Consciousness of Young Readers," Diss., St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 2007.
[47] Flynn, "Talbot Press (1913–1970)," Letter, 19 July 1921, 41; 49.
[48] The Educational Company of Ireland (1910–present) and Browne & Nolan were the main educational publishers.
[49] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 5.
[50] Flynn, 34.
[51] Coghlan 150; 152; 158.

Becoming an Irish Children's Writer

Dillon became a professional writer in the 1940s at a time when the country was, as Michael O'Brien states, 'bereft of people to look up to in children's literature'.[53] Dillon, unsurprisingly, greatly admired children's writers of an earlier era, in particular, the prolific Maria Edgeworth for her moral stories aimed at the character formation of her readers, and Somerville and Ross as suited to teenage readers. However, there were only a few more recent Irish writers who she could regard as successful role models in this field, among them, Eileen O'Faoláin (1900–88), wife of Seán, who had been published in Ireland by Browne & Nolan from 1935 onwards. Dillon commended her for 'the great seriousness and professionalism' that she brought to writing and for her stories written in an intimate way, 'as if they were to be heard by children sitting around a turf fire in a country kitchen'. She also noted that Eileen O'Faoláin's work in translation would ensure that it would continue to stay alive in other cultures – something she greatly desired for her own writing.[54]

It is surprising that Dillon, with this ambition to be recognised internationally, makes only scant reference to Patricia Lynch (1900–72) who had attained worldwide success as the author of forty-eight books and two hundred short stories for young people. Lynch had, by locating her stories mainly in rural Ireland, proved that it was possible to write popular stories in a local setting that was appreciated, not only by Irish children, but also by a wider audience. She wrote of a make-believe Ireland, sprinkled with elements of fantasy and fairytale, and peopled with peddlers, fiddlers, leprechauns, changelings, magical creatures and talking animals. Lynch described her books as 'stories of fairs and fireside, with the turf glowing on the hearth'. In a comment that could easily be mistaken as a description of Dillon's work, Lynch speaks of her books as involving journeys and homecomings, and characters 'who find adventure whether they turn to the heroic past or the unknown future'. With an uncanny similarity to Dillon's views, Lynch wrote that her collection of legends were aimed at the preservation of 'the early history and memory of the race'.[55] She also, in *Fiddler's Quest*, treated the topic of rebellion, a subject that was close to Dillon's heart. With her impressive, prodigious output and international recognition, Lynch paved the way for Irish children's writers of the time to be published in translation in a worldwide context. It is unclear if Dillon, often viewed as a natural successor to Lynch, acknowledged this connection.[56] While there are obvious similarities in the work of the two writers, their emphases are different. The Ireland of Lynch's books is static, rooted in the past and likely to remain so, while Dillon's Ireland, although similarly situated in traditional landscapes, is imbued with hope through the spirit of the young protagonists, their conciliatory attitudes and new-found confidence. As such, Dillon presents the prospect of a prosperous, confident future in an independent country, embodied in a young generation who are well-versed in valuable traditions.

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[52] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, "Rev. of Studies in Children's Literature 1500–2000 by Celia Keenan and Mary Shine Thompson," 8 Jan. 2011 http://www.poetryireland.ie/resources/feature-articles/review.html.
[53] O'Brien, Interview.
[54] Dillon, "An appreciation of Eileen Ó Faoláin," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 4 Oct. 1988.

In a National Library folder entitled "Very early efforts. Why did I keep them?" a number of Dillon's early stories are filed.[57] These are fanciful tales, which feature extraordinary protagonists including a thirsty house, a talking crow and a fire tongs and his poker wife. These moral tales, dating from an early stage of Dillon's experimentation with writing, adopt elements of the fairytale genre. In a possible, unintended mimicking of Lynch, she includes some elements of magic and anthropomorphism. She may also have been encouraged by the success of writer, Mary Flynn, with her very popular *Cornelius Rabbit* series,[58] as well as by that of Eileen O'Faoláin. Dillon, with her belief in quality literature for the very young produced a variety of books for this age group throughout her career. The stories are appealing and are written simply but with a respect for the attention span and understanding of small children. These tales, like the earlier ones in the Irish language, were favourably reviewed for being told with clarity, for their sense of playfulness and effective storytelling style. For example, the first of these books, the unlikely story of a runaway house, *The Wild Little House,* (1955)[59] was described as 'original and enchanting [...] enlivened by fine illustrations' by VH Drummond and as 'an imaginative piece of fun for the very small'.[60] *King Big Ears* (1961),[61] a re-telling of an old Irish legend, was described as 'a charming, light-hearted and most satisfactory fairy story for reading or telling'.[62] The picture book, *The Wise Man on the Mountain* (1969), illustrated by Gaynor Chapman, is a particularly attractive picture book, being a timeless story told with humour and simplicity that articulates the basic moral that 'it is a great blessing to be contented'.[63] *The Horse-Fancier* (1985),[64] written much later in Dillon's career tells of a young boy with a horse in an urban high-rise setting, a subject later developed in Irish cinema and in a picture book for older children.[65]

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[55] Patricia Lynch, "Catholic Authors -Your Guide to Catholic Literature," 16 Apr.2010. http://www.catholicauthors.com/lynch.html.
[56] Mary Crosbie, "Told by the Swallow," *John O'London's Weekly* [London] 31 Mar. 1950.
[57] Dillon, 33325, "Very early efforts. Why did I keep them?".
[58] Written by Mary Flynn (no relation to previous Mary Flynn mentioned) initially published by Talbot Press, 1944–6.

The Cats' Opera, written in 1962, is perhaps the most unusual of Dillon's books for the very young.[66] While deemed successful as a storybook, its stage adaptation in 1981, for which Dillon wrote both the script and musical score, was not well received. The performance was prestigious in that it was the matinee show[67] for the Peacock Theatre Christmas season, was directed by Ben Barnes, later Director of the Abbey Theatre, and included a cast of emerging actors.[68] The critics were scathing in their comments about the opera, stating that there was 'uncertainty of pitch' and that it was 'too juvenile to stir the parents', and 'too foreign to a child's experience and fantasy to move the kids'.[69] There was acknowledgement of 'a splendid and original idea' but criticism of both the script and the performance.[70] One comment, that a cats' disco would have been a more suitable theme than an opera, highlights the central problem, which is Dillon's failure to understand the changing world of children, most of whom had little interest in opera, a pursuit that she considered worthy.[71] She had written the story twenty years earlier for a different child audience and, as one writer believes, 'for the most precocious of youngsters'.[72] However, despite what was perceived as a clumsy and outdated attempt to entertain, *The Cats' Opera* provides evidence of Dillon's eagerness to experiment with form.

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[59] Dillon, *The Wild Little House* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955).
[60] This book was serialised in the Australian schools' magazine, *Countdown*, Vol. 78, 1 Feb. 1993 http://www.eilisdillon.com/02YX1.Wild.htmlrev.
[61] Dillon, *King Big Ears* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961).
[62] "Woking News/Church Times," *The Auckland Star*, 10 Oct. 2010 http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.
[63] Dillon, *The Wise Man on the Mountain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969).
[64] Dillon, *The Horse Fancier* (London: Macmillan, 1985).
[65] *Into the West*, dir. Mike Newell, writ.Jim Sheridan, 1993. Film. Caroline Binch, *Christy's Dream* (London; Penguin Group, 1999).
[66] Dillon, *The Cats' Opera* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962).
[67] Dillon, *The Cats' Opera*, dir. Ben Barnes, Peacock Theatre (Abbey Theatre) Dublin, Christmas 1981. Performance. It shared the programme for the evening performance of *The Hostage*, by Brendan Behan.

Dillon's books for eight to twelve year olds can be seen to emulate Lynch to some extent in topic and tone. The earliest of these, *Midsummer Magic* (1950),[73] a story about a magic soda cake and talking animals, was welcomed as being written 'not only simply but imaginatively as well'.[74] Soon afterwards, however, Dillon, understanding the anthropomorphic approach as outdated and no longer popular with publishers, came to believe that 'in the hands of the mediocre writer, the animals are insulted and so is the child's intelligence'.[75] She therefore chose to abandon it and started to experiment with other subject matter. While continuing to deal with animals, she began, with a certain prescience, to confront the sort of ecological issues that feature strongly in children's literature today. In *Plover Hill* (1957), a young boy helps his grandfather to save an island and its animals from an unscrupulous developer, while *A Family of Foxes* (1964) describes efforts to save foxes threatened with extinction.[76]

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[68] Malcolm Douglas, Michael Grenell, Isobel Mahon, Clive Geraghty, Peadar Lamb, John Olohan and Kathleen Barrington formed part of the cast.
[69] Paddy Woodworth, "Rev. of *The Cats' Opera* by Eilís Dillon," *Irish Press* [Dublin] 17 Dec. 1981.
[70] Maev Kennedy, "Rev.," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 17 Dec. 1981.
[71] Desmond Rushe, *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 17 Dec.1981.
[72] Paddy Woodworth, *Irish Press* [Dublin] 17 Dec. 1981.
[73] Dillon, *Midsummer Magic* (London: Macmillan, 1950).
[74] "Rev. of Midsummer Magic," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 18 Feb. 1950.
[75] Dillon, "Literature" 6.

A few of the stories in this category address the issues that preoccupied Dillon and which reappear in her other works. The story, *Down in the World*, is directly drawn from Dillon's memory of the most heartbreaking experience of her childhood. It describes a family losing their home due to alleged mishandling of their affairs by a bank manager who wished to secure the house for a friend. It is a re-telling of her memory of her parents' predicament when they were forced to sell their beloved Dangan House in Galway – a time of great loss and insecurity for her as a young child.[77] The two books that Dillon set in Italy, and written when she lived there during the 1960s, also feature houses prominently in the storyline. In *The King's Room*, (1972) Dillon uses the house, an archive 'full of memories of interesting things that had happened', to explore the contrast between the need to remember and, equally, the need to forget. Mirroring a theme that recurs in her work for teenagers and adults, namely, the experience of war, she reminds the reader that while 'ugly things are better forgotten', the lessons learned should be remembered.[78] In *The Orange Grove*, (1968)[79] a very important Roman ruin in the grounds of the house must be saved. The bid to find a solution allows Dillon to consider another recurring theme, namely, 'the particularly close kinship which often exists between the very young and the very old', who find affinity in their frailty and vulnerability.[80] In both of these books, Dillon, as always, pays great attention to the setting, replacing the wild Irish background with sunbathed orange groves in one and the antiquity of Rome in the other. Using language described as 'deceptively simple', Dillon manages to evoke a sense of time and place, telling the stories 'in a heart-warming way'.[81]

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[76] Dillon, *Plover Hill* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957); *A Family of Foxes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964). The latter was considered by the Disney Corporation.

[77] Dillon, *Down in the World* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983). Dillon describes this incident in *Inside Ireland*, 94.

[78] Dillon, *The King's Room* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972) 35; 35; 59.

[79] Dillon, *The Orange Grove* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968).

[80] *Times Literary Supplement*, undated. 14 May 2010. http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.

[81] Eithne Strong, "Rev of. *The Orange Grove* by Eilís Dillon," *Irish Press*, [Dublin] 14 Dec. 1968.

'Teenage' Adventure Story

In 1918, Stephen J. Brown articulated the lack of 'strongly national' material specifically for Irish boys. He stated that since Ireland did not have independent status, it was impossible to provide stories that were 'distinctively national' to compete with British stories and their symbols of Empire.[82] Dillon, writing a generation after Brown, sought to fill this still largely vacant niche for authentic Irish popular literature, written and produced by Irish people at a time when 'there was a very scorched earth barren literary landscape'.[83] Borrowing from the well-established model of the British adventure story, Dillon created her own version of the genre suited to young Irish people. Using the basic adventure story template, she tailored it to her purposes by including distinctively Irish settings and characters that embodied Irish tradition, language and custom. As Dunbar states:

> Dillon gave readers of the time, growing up in Ireland, who would not have had much access to other Irish material, something that definitely was recognisably their own. Whatever else one might say about all these island books, there is a sense of Ireland in them and I think for that alone she deserves much praise.[84]

In an emulation of the British adventure story, but with an Irish emphasis, Dillon engages with a number of tropes used in imperial fiction, namely, the physical journey of the young male, his growth into adulthood, the need for resourcefulness, skill and dexterity, and the expected modes of behaviour for boys. The island locations described by Defoe, Ballantyne and Stevenson[85] are replaced in her stories by wind-swept islands off Ireland's western seaboard, where survival is achieved through courage and skill. The upper-class life of Hughes's sporting English schoolboy is exchanged for the life of the hard-working young

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[82] Stephen J. Brown, "Irish Fiction for Boys," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 7.28 (Dec. 1918): 665–670, 668, 30 Mar. 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/30092707.

[83] O'Brien, Interview.

[84] Dunbar, Interview.

[85] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), RM Ballantyne, *The Coral Island* (1858), RL Stevenson *Treasure Island* (1883).

Irish boy helping his family to put food on the table.[86] The adventurous spirit and derring-do of GA Henty's would-be soldier and his imperial battles are supplanted by echoes of the heroic deeds of the Irish peasant warrior.[87] Dillon had studied in detail the work of earlier writers and praises Stevenson in particular for 'his knack of placing a country boy in the midst of wide adventures and letting his native wits solve his problem for him'. She further notes that while these stories often have distant settings, their 'accurate observations of natural things' make them accessible to all. Although mirroring this British tradition, Dillon also remains conscious of the international fairy tale as well as the Irish tradition of adventure built around a lonely boy who sets out to solve a problem or riddle 'with nothing but his wits to help him'. In this, she turns for inspiration to Padraic Colum's *The King of Ireland's Son*, which she sees as 'the prototype of all such stories, mixing and blending all the traditional elements in a masterly way', and for its evocation of 'the feel of the countryside and its inhabitants, without the smallest feeling of vulgarity or patronage'.[88]

Merging the best of these British and Irish traditions, Dillon aimed to present Irish children with something that would aid their development as good citizens in an independent Ireland and engender confidence in their ability to achieve. She believed that Irish children's lack of confidence, shyness and inability to express themselves was due to Ireland's troubled history.[89] This inhibition might also be attributed to the dreadful corporal punishment that she had witnessed being meted out to fellow pupils in the local school in Connemara, a practice that was replicated in schools nationwide. Added to this, it was a time in Ireland when, as Flynn points out, in religious texts young readers were not only 'constantly reminded of their imperfections, inadequacies and weaknesses', but were also encouraged to obey their elders unquestioningly.[90] Dillon sought to address in some way the resulting lack of confidence, through her teenage adventurers as they embarked on their journey into manhood to take their place in the adult world.

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[86] Thomas Hughes, *Tom Browne's Schooldays* (1857).

[87] GA Henty (1832–1902), novelist, was best known for imperialist, historical adventures.

[88] Dillon, "Literature in a Rural Background" 4; 9; 9; 5.

[89] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 21.

[90] Flynn, "Talbot" 56.

Dillon's teenage stories were regularly reviewed as 'books for boys', unsurprisingly, since her protagonists are invariably young males. Publisher Michael O'Brien, baffled by the fact that Dillon, despite her publishing *nous*, neglected to include female protagonists, claims: 'She didn't know, but seventy percent of all children's books are read by girls and a hundred percent of all her books were about boys'.[91] In fact, Dillon was fully aware of this, her rationale being 'that girls will tolerate books totally about boys, while the reverse is rarely true'.[92] Dunbar, on the other hand, believes that her use of young rural male protagonists reflected the era in which Dillon was writing, since boys had more freedom to engage in risk-taking. He remarks that 'girls by their calling, or lack of it, were much more insignificant figures in the overall scheme of things'.[93] Dillon herself notes the greater freedom enjoyed by boys who, being outdoors, are able 'to take off for whole days at a time without any questions asked, while girls are usually kept closer to home'.[94] It was, as she explains, expected that the boys would help out with farming duties, yet accepted that being naturally exuberant, they would need to 'take longer on a job' than the adult males. The boys conspired in keeping their real capacity for work a secret. Dillon elaborates, 'In the remote country that I was writing about, the boys put on their caps in the morning and disappeared for the day. [...] They were apprenticed to farming and fishing, but they had plenty of free time'. Through circumstance, these boy heroes, usually due to the untimely death, or through the disappearance of a father, find that they are left largely fending for themselves. However, Dillon, with a sense of personal constraint and a consciousness of societal attitudes, shoulders authorial responsibility towards them. She ensures the safety of her protagonist through a caring adult presence, 'some kindly soul' who could be trusted but who did not feel so strongly about the boy to prevent him from having 'rather a free life'.

Dillon also understood the limits of what was considered acceptable in the Irish context, commenting that the freedom that Huckleberry Finn experienced in his adventures a hundred years earlier, would not have been allowed in Ireland,

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[91] O'Brien, Interview.
[92] Dillon, "Literature" 1.
[93] Dunbar, Interview.
[94] Dillon, "Literature" 1.

'even before the welfare state' had encouraged a more strict societal regime.[95] Such liberty would not be approved of for girls who stayed closer to the house and were under supervision in helping with household chores. O'Brien concluded, following discussion with Dillon, that her choice 'was a definite kind of psychological preference', that 'it was almost as if boys were more important than girls'.[96] However, it would appear, on balance, that the decision to focus on boys was, like her earlier decision to write in English, a pragmatic response aimed at gaining a dual readership of both boys and girls. It was late in her career when Dillon, in a probable recognition of the greater empowerment of females in society, gave a central role to female characters in *The Island of Ghosts* (1989).[97]

While British adventure stories defined what it was to be a boy in an imperial setting, Dillon described what it was to be an *Irish* boy in an *Irish* setting, who, as he grows towards manhood, faces similar moral and physical dilemmas to those of his colonising counterparts. She relates the hardships endured by the male adolescent, the challenges faced by him, the need to take on the mantle of responsibility at a young age and his eventual acceptance into the male-dominated society in which he lives. Her young men develop not only in physical strength but also in boldness of spirit, in moral courage, loyalty and truth. This physical, moral and social coming of age is presented in an understated way, as understood within their Irish communities. In the *Fort of Gold* (1961), for example, she recounts this passage into manhood through the voice of fourteen-year old Michael who has just finished school. Entering the real world of work, he recalls that after his first day farming, he told his mother 'how it felt to be a man'. Nevertheless, he knows he still has a lot to learn from his strong and powerful father, the King of Inishdara Island, who 'used to the full the brains that God had given him, and who felt a deep responsibility to his people'. Michael's emergence into manhood is marked, not by any communal or public ceremony but by his father offering him a pull of his pipe. He remembers: 'From that day onwards our way of talking to each other changed'. He further recalls:

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[95] "Eilís in Wonderland," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 18 Dec. 1972, 9.
[96] O'Brien, Interview.
[97] Dillon, *The Island of Ghosts* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989).

> In this way I learned a great deal about the good sense and the reasons behind our ancient traditions, and the dangers of not taking heed of my ancestors' wisdom. "Never make a custom, never break a custom" was one of my father's favourite proverbs.[98]

In quoting this maxim learned during her childhood, Dillon exemplifies her tendency to pass on through her protagonists the lessons that she had learned as a young person. The boys in her stories are made aware of their place in the community and of the need for tolerance of their 'older fellow humans whose feuding, irascibility and eccentricity they have to learn to understand'.[99] They are not encouraged to question their elders, although that would change with their growth in confidence. One older character in *The Fort of Gold* comments on this development, saying that it was 'a changed world where a boy could ask an older man a question about the morality of something that he was ordered to do'.[100] This was true also in the national sense where, in a new Ireland, a more confident younger generation had begun to question the motives and actions of their forebears. Indeed, the issue of confidence may well have come from the Plunkett and Dillon belief in self-improvement and may also been part of the wider family discourse. Sir Horace Plunkett had, in a somewhat controversial discussion on the flaws of the Irish character, advocated the 'fostering of moral courage, initiative, independence and self-reliance in the Irish people',[101] while Eilís's father, Thomas Dillon, dreaming of an industrialised post-independent Ireland, believed that 'self-confidence would replace the dispirited attitudes which stultified all progress'.[102] Eilís Dillon saw these as essential virtues to be transmitted to young people, who would become the future leaders of Ireland and would, by having self-confidence, bring prosperity and development to the country.

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[98] Dillon, *Fort* 5; Dillon, *Inside* 145.
[99] Robert Dunbar, "Seekers after the Self," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 June 1991.
[100] Dillon, *Fort* 120.
[101] Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (1st ed. 1905) This ed. (London: The Echo Press, 2006) x.
[102] Dillon, *Inside* 93.

Search for Identity

Inherent also within the adventure genre is the individual's search for identity through a physical voyage of discovery, mirrored by an inner journey of the self. The reader normally identifies with the protagonist and accompanies him 'to vicariously negotiate various transformative experiences and come to an understanding of self'.[103] This involves 'a regressive pull back to what is known, familiar and safe, and a forward movement out to the world'.[104] Meena Khorana aptly describes such journeys as 'the passage towards identity, formation and self-discovery' and as a 'movement from innocence to experience, from security to uncertainty, from sunshine and summer to stormy clashes'.[105]

However, in Dillon's adventures, 'the stormy clashes' relate almost exclusively to the physical, as the young people battle with the power of the sea or the conniving schemes of human adversaries. Surprisingly, her re-telling of the medieval legend *The Voyage of Mael Duin*[106] was considered by reviewers to be 'a tale on two levels, as all myths should be, outward adventure of the physical world, inward transformation of the human personality'.[107] Yet, in this and subsequent books, the more important inner struggle is merely implied and Dillon focuses mainly on the actual adventures on land and at sea. The interior turmoil and insecurity common to young people fail to emerge in the voices of the supposed teenage narrators of these stories. Instead, speaking from the vantage point of retrospection, they describe with the wisdom of hindsight, not what it is to be fourteen, but their memory of what it was to be a fourteen year-old boy. The issue is further complicated since Dillon is writing from a female perspective, while simultaneously adopting the voice of a first person male narrator, in the hope of providing the reader with the sensation of living as a young man among the island people. In the confusion of both personae, she omits the articulation of realistic inner angst on the part of her young protagonists.[108] In addition, the absence of female companions in these novels means that the tensions of physical attraction are not explored, and Dillon fails to avail of an opportunity to be a guiding voice in this regard. However, Dunbar praises Dillon's 'ability to penetrate the surface of youthful thinking and behaviour' and sees her greatest strength as her recognition of 'the need to give her young characters – all of them "seekers" – space and time to grow, so that they can eventually and confidently take their place in an adult world: their transition from child to adolescent to adult is always secure'.[109]

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[103] Meena G. Khorana, Introduction, *Bookbird, A Journal of International Children's literature*, The International Board on Books for Young People, 35.2 (Summer 1997).

[104] Richard Frankel, *The Adolescent Psyche, Jungian and Winnicottian Perspectives* (Hove & New York: Burnner-Routledge, 1998) 6.

[105] Khorana, *Bookbird.*

[106] Dillon, *The Voyage of Mael Duin* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969).

[107] Hugh McKinley, *Athens Daily Post*, 21 Dec. 1969.

But this evaluation also hints at Dillon's limitations in portraying the inner conflict of the individual. The guaranteed 'security' of the future of these young heroes, almost indistinguishable one from the other in these various adventure books, leads to a predictability within these stories, although one which may be desirable for the reader in search of a happy ending. There is in all of them the expectation that these boys will, in the future, become the ideal Irish citizens of Dillon's imagination. Their adventures have served them well in achieving this aim and in making them appreciate their home and homeland. On their travels, they have encountered people from other lands, including Breton fishermen and Spanish-speaking villains. They have uncovered ancient artefacts, saved an island from destruction, prevented murder, battled with the sea and discovered a lost island.[110] They have looked outwards, taken risks, exercised judgement, made decisions and mistakes, but, in the end, arrived home safely, with prospects for a wonderful future, presumably in the confident new Ireland that Dillon envisages. As Michael in *The Lost Island* declares, 'I felt I was on the edge of something marvellous, something that would make the whole world look different ever after'.[111] Her protagonists may be on the cusp of new adventures, adult aventures that might take them physically far from home, but they will never be far psychologically from their internalised roots – nor would the author of these books.

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[108] Dillon, "Literature" 15.
[109] Dunbar, "Seekers after the Self," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 June 1991.
[110] *The Singing Cave, The Sea Wall, The House on the Shore, The San Sebastian* and *The Lost Island*, respectively.
[111] Dillon, *Lost Island* 73.

The Island as Literary Setting

Dillon very deliberately chose a western rural setting since, as in her view and experience, country children 'take part in everyday affairs', doing everything that adults do and 'are not excluded from adult preoccupations and difficulties'. She was greatly impressed by *The Honey Siege*, a story by French author Gil Buhet,[112] because it accorded with her belief that the bureaucracy of an urban setting hinders the possibilities of plot, whereas the lack of 'faceless power' can provide 'useful plots and complications'. Nor did urban settings provide opportunity for descriptions of nature's force, of wild landscape and the great outdoors that she enjoyed so much. The island, by contrast, provided the ultimate removal from urban life and all that it entails. Dillon, fondly remembering her childhood spent in the west, defends her choice of setting as a natural one for her. She recalls, 'I camped there, rode horses, sailed boats, did many of the things described in those books (the island stories) – but fortunately on a tamer scale'.[113] Through the island location, the last bastion of a life free from outside influences, she could inspire a new generation of Irish people to an appreciation of Irish identity. This choice of the island as a setting in children's literature is not new. It is well established as a location that provides the young protagonist with opportunities for independent roaming, exploration and discovery in relative safety and at a remove from adult supervision. With its isolation, it is also a place where traditions are preserved and customs are adhered to unquestioningly. It is largely defined by the fickle sea, which is seen both as friend and enemy – sometimes providing a livelihood and at other times tragically taking life away. With its inherent danger, the sea offers scope for adventurous voyages and presents physical and psychological challenges that trigger anxiety and demand respect. The islanders are not concerned with war or invasion but with the constant threat of the untamed force of the sea. As one of Dillon's characters states, 'We battle with the sea every day of our lives and none of us wants to give her the satisfaction of winning that battle'.[114] That battle is compounded by the 'desolation and terrible lonesomeness' represented by the seagulls' call, 'the loneliest sound in all the world'.[115]

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[112] Gil Buhet, *The Honey Siege* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958).
[113] Dillon, "Literature" 1; 2; 11.
[114] Dillon, *Singing Cave* 45.

The sea, recalled by Dillon, forms a strong and powerful presence in these books and she portrays it in all its beautiful and brooding moods. It is unpredictable, a force not to be trusted or taken for granted: 'One moment it's smiling at you and the next moment it takes your life'.[116] Sometimes it is 'a wicked monster, a silent unpredictable enemy waiting to swallow up the island', while at other times it takes on human characteristics: 'When it reached the sea wall, it lowered its head and began to crawl out sideways, looking, it seemed, for an easy way around the island'.[117] Occasionally, it is benign and guileless, 'shining under a sweet gentle breeze'. Dillon also evokes in lyrical descriptions that contrast with the harsh life of the location, the beauty and light, as well as the cosiness, continuation and completeness of island life: 'Over all the island a white light seemed to rest, so that it was like living inside one of those curved, smooth shells that seem to have no beginning and no end'.[118]

The small island, in its relationship to the mainland, is often viewed in postcolonial terms as a microcosm of the connection between Ireland and Britain.[119] Dillon's islanders, like those depicted by Synge before her, are uncontaminated by the perceived sophistication of the mainland and its administration. They see themselves as 'other', not only from the British Empire, but also from the excessive bureaucratic zeal of the independent Ireland, now emulating its former colonisers. The islanders' healthy suspicion of strangers and distrust of authority of any kind – of school inspectors, Civic Guards and County Councillors, people who would be 'looking at everything and counting everything' – is counterbalanced by their own sense of responsibility towards their island. They adhere to a moral law only truly understood by those born into it and which, in these novels, justifies ship wreckage as a legitimate gift from the sea, and the stealing of gold as honest in a good cause. Dillon compounds the metaphor in *The*

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[115] Dillon, *San Sebastian* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953) 108; 169.
[116] Dillon, *Lost Island* 42.
[117] Dillon, *Sea Wall* 13; 118.
[118] Dillon, *Fort* 33.
[119] As explored by George Bernard Shaw in his comedy *John Bull's Other Island* (1904).

Sea Wall by reminding us that 'the whole of Ireland is an island'[120] and, in a nod to Shaw, names the island in *The Coriander* as Inishthorav or Bull's island.[121] However, Robert Dunbar, unsure if such metaphorical allusion is intended, admits that 'if you're straining for a metaphor you can find it' but, on balance, feels that for Dillon 'it's more just a device'.[122]

Whatever its benefit as a literary contrivance, the island is, as Ó Cuilleanáin recognises, very important for the author herself. He points out that these books allowed his mother 'to access a different version of Ireland' or what he terms 'a suspended version' of it in a timeless era. He comments that she was able 'to project an alternative Ireland, what Ireland should be rather than what Ireland is, stuck as she was in the real thing'.[123] This appears to coincide with Dillon's desire to retreat to the past and to the outdoor life of sailing and horse riding as previously described. The island of her stories formed an escape, not only for her characters but also for Dillon herself, from the more disagreeable aspects of the world around her and what she saw as its literary narrow-mindedness and petty outlook, as described within this dissertation. It seems that, by retreating into the island of her children's books, she was able to create a world in which she retrieved a sense of her own past and of her happy memories of it. However, apart from its use as a location for adventure and as an escape valve for the author, the island as setting provided a third benefit. Even more importantly for Dillon, the island was the home of the people of the west, characters still vivid from her childhood memories that she wished to introduce to her readers as representative of true Irish national identity.

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[120] Dillon, *Sea Wall* 39; 22.

[121] Dillon, *The Coriander* (London: Faber & Faber) 1963.

[122] Dunbar, Interview.

[123] Ó Cuilleanáin, Interview.

Remembering and Reinventing the People of the West

> I had become attached to this part of the world, and to the slow moving people who lived there, and I knew this would continue as long as I lived. And that's how it has turned out.[124]

This strong sentiment, attributed to Peter, the young protagonist in *A Herd of Deer*, is an articulation of Dillon's parallel identification with a place and its people. These teenage stories typically begin in this way with the male narrator reminiscing about his experiences. For example, the novel *The San Sebastian* opens wistfully with the words: 'As long as I live I shall never forget'.[125] Once again, it appears that Dillon is voicing a personal need to remember an idyllic world of the past. Selected memories of apparently halcyon days of childhood, spent among the people of the west, allowed her to present the poor, rural communities in an idealised way and to follow a well-known literary tradition of such representation. The practice of idealising the rural dweller had begun with the mid-nineteenth century interest in Irish rural customs and stories, and intensified with the Irish Literary Revival when writers, in an effort to counter the stereotype of the buffoon or stage Irishman, created 'a spiritual vision of the peasantry' and a more noble representation of Irishness.[126] Irish individuality and identity were sought in a return to aspects of life that were distinctively 'unEnglish', with the peasant furnishing 'a native knowledge of the language and a correspondingly picturesque lifestyle'.[127] The 'aestheticizing' of the Irish country people, allowed the peasant to become 'the living embodiment of the "Celtic" imagination, a natural aristocrat'. The peasant signified authenticity, the true Irishman, the key-holder to ancient Irish customs, and was defined as 'the essence of an ancient dignified Irish culture'. Just as the land took on a mythological importance, the peasant was invented as kind, noble, hard working and honest. The writers of the Revival were removed from the reality of the extreme poverty of the majority of the people and so, being detached, could treat the peasant as 'a romantic emblem of a deep cultural pastoral and significantly anti-commercial (or non-materialistic) Irish life'.[128] Dillon, although never using the term 'peasant', preferring to use 'people', espoused this Revivalist opinion of the rural population as a lost aristocracy who, with their politeness, hospitality and 'grand manner', maintained 'racial memory of their former greatness'.[129]

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[124] Dillon, *Herd of Deer* 18.

[125] Dillon, *The San Sebastian* 2.

[126] PJ Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2003)12; 11.

[127] Joep Leersen, *Remembrance and Imagination, Critical Conditions*, Ser. Field Day Monographs, 4 (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996) 197.

However, as Hirsch explains, 'the peasants no longer existed by the time they were being fiercely "discovered"'.[130] There was what he calls a 'disjunction' between the real and the imaginary rural person, causing some writers to choose the islands of the west as the last bastions of rural tradition. The island became the ideal location where peasant life could apparently continue uninterrupted and uncontaminated by materialism, bureaucracy and snobbery – features of the developing Ireland. By the 1950s, unlike the image portrayed by Dillon when she began to write about the islands, conditions on many of them were anything but ideal. The inhabitants of the Blasket Islands for example, 'in a state of despair', due to the effects of emigration, isolation, impoverished circumstances and an unsustainable way of life, were demanding to be moved to the mainland. Government reports of the islanders' living conditions, as being comparable to those of the Dublin slums, were shocking:

> The Blasket islanders are mostly housed in hovels as bad as anything in Gardiner or Gloucester Street in their worst days. They have no church, no priest, no doctor [...] Their only means of livelihood are the grazing of mountain sheep and lobster fishing. They are dying out and perhaps it is better for them so.[131]

Life on the island, as Dillon recalled and described it, was becoming a mere memory for many of those who had lived on it. While supposedly regarded as the guardians of 'the authentic Irish Ireland', island communities were left in a state of deprivation, with the people eventually beginning to leave their island homes.[132] Keogh describes that the islanders, once settled on the mainland, 'could look out daily across the sea and remember life as it had been for their parents and ancestors'.[133] This was the evolving reality for islanders, in direct opposition to Dillon's depiction of an alleged idyllic lifestyle. Dillon perpetuated the myth in her fictional islanders, whose 'main belief is that the island is the best place in the whole world to spend one's days'.[134] In adhering to her Revivalist view of the people of the west as 'most distinctively and authentically Irish', she upheld them as a symbol of nationalism, since 'to define an idea of the Irish peasant was to define an idea of Ireland itself'.[135] In doing this, she allies herself to Synge who saw in these people, however poor, a finer type of aristocracy, both well-bred and charming.[136] They were a versatile, vibrant people made strong in character by their traditional occupations and by their perpetual battle with the sea. Their heightened sense of living was in contrast to a dull life on the mainland which was seen as 'anglicised and civilised and brutalised'.[137] Yet Dillon, unlike Synge, who recognised himself as an outsider, seemed to believe that she, due to her early contact with the people there, belonged among them, despite living most of her life in cities. Her island setting was a *milieu de mémoire*, a place where all that was good in Ireland's past, and in her own, could be preserved. Suzanne Rahn sees the benefit of Dillon's island communities in being 'so small, cohesive, self-sufficient and slow to change that they function almost like extended families, surviving by fishing, by subsistence farming in barren rocky soil'.[138]

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[128] Edward Hirsch, "The Imaginary Irish Peasant," *PMLA* 106 (5 Oct. 1991) 1119; 1120; 1122, 13 May 2010 http://www.jstor.org/stable/462684.
[129] Dillon, *Inside* 87.
[130] Hirsch 1118.
[131] Keogh et al. *Ireland* 51. Rept. *Roinn an Taoisigh*, 6 Lúnasa 1947 (Dept. of the Taoiseach, 6 Aug. 1947).

Occasionally, Dillon allows reality to intrude. An episode relayed to her about Tory Island appears in the novel, *The Coriander*, and deals with efforts by the locals to redress the crucial lack of medical aid, by kidnapping a doctor.[139] This harsh reality of the isolated life is presented in a light-hearted way and not as the serious issue that it was. Dillon's details of people going about their daily chores, the women spinning outside in the sun where they could 'feel every sensation with a special sharpness',[140] gives the impression, previously articulated by Synge, that people who live close to nature experience a greater intensity of life than the urban dweller. Their sense of fun is equally intense and they enter into the spirit of the local sports day with its currach races, storytelling competitions and games of 'trick of the loop' and 'push ha'penny'.[141]

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[132] The island populations declined rapidly from 124 inhabited islands in 1911, to just twenty-one in 1991. Ferriter, *Transformation* 379.
[133] Keogh 71.
[134] Dillon, *Fort* 74.
[135] Hirsch 1121; 1118.
[136] JM Synge, *The Aran Islands (1907)* in *The Complete Works of JM Synge, Plays Prose and Poetry*, ed. Aidan Arrowsmith (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2008) 32–33.
[137] Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001) 421.
[138] Suzanne Rahn, "'Inishrone Is Our Island': Rediscovering the Novels of Eilís Dillon," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21.3 (Sep. 1997): 347–368, 347.
[139] Dillon, "Literature" 4.

Dunbar sees the island setting as particularly helpful to Dillon's character portrayal and commentary on life, noting that the island 'though small, isolated and inward looking, affords material for a wise and compassionate survey of humanity and its ways'.[142] Dillon, either consciously or subconsciously, employed the didactic possibilities of the island communities to promote a unity that could apply to the independent Ireland as it progressed. Faced with enormous physical challenges, the island population, in a model of Dillon's perception of the ideal society, forms an interdependent and tightly knit community in which everyone has a role. This is articulated in *The Fort of Gold*:

'The whole economy of our island depended on each person having a sense of his part in it, from the four-year old boy minding a goose to the great-grandmother of ninety left in charge of the cradle'.[143]

In *The Sea Wall*, a similar moral is presented. When the giant wave threatens to destroy the island, 'every family was together and that's how it should be in times of misfortune'.[144] The communal spirit and sense of generosity is central to island life and Dillon presents it as a stark contrast to the divisions that had plagued Irish society in the early years of independence. On Dillon's islands, the people behave with quiet dignity, are proud, noble and wise and adhere to the best of Irish traditional values. While they have little formal education, their core values outweigh any sort of 'book learning' since they have a wisdom that is 'deep, sustaining and sure'.[145] The young people are brought up to value the wisdom of their elders and to know that 'it's a terrible thing to go against your forefathers, making yourself different, thinking you can do better than them'.[146] As quintessentially good Irish people, they acquaint themselves with their traditions, valuing their ancient language and its accompanying myths and stories.

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[140] Dillon, *Fort* 95.
[141] Dillon, *Singing* 182.
[142] Dunbar, "Seekers," *Irish Times.*
[143] Dillon, *Fort* 53.
[144] Dillon, *Sea* 3.

The few female characters that Dillon includes very occasionally in these stories exemplify the links between older and younger members of the community, with the author noting that girls could 'make useful allies or liaisons between adults and children, because they have the confidence of their parents'.[147] Even more important are the wise elderly women who play a more significant part in advising and encouraging the youths in the stories.[148] Dunbar praises the skill of Dillon's characterisation, noting that 'she is very good with these wise old women characters who, of course, are a stock feature of Irish literature'.[149] For her, this alliance between the old and the young is natural as they are 'both full of ideas and experiences but rather helpless because of their dependence on a more powerful generation'.[150] In these adventure stories, older women are characters who can be trusted. For example, Old Katta in *The Fort of Gold* becomes a confidante for the young boys and they share their secret with her 'because of her lion's heart' and 'her quick mind'.[151] Dillon admits to liking the particular association between children and grandmothers, and uses this key relationship in *The Island of Horses*. The boys bring the grandmother, aged eighty-one, back to the island of her youth and on the journey learn to 'understand and appreciate her mixture of romanticism and practicality'. As Dillon explains, 'their fellow-feeling is complete when they find that she can appreciate their adventure as well as they do themselves'.[152] It is probable that Dillon's kindly portrayals are influenced by the close relationship that she had built with the Countess, her own maternal grandmother.

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[145] Dillon, *House* 38.
[146] Dillon, *Sea* 47.
[147] Dillon, "Literature" 1.
[148] For example, in *The Island of Ghosts*, the two boys each have a younger sister.
[149] Dunbar, Interview.
[150] Dillon, "Literature" 3.
[151] Dillon, *Fort* 98.
[152] Dillon, "Literature" 3.

Using the traditional *caoineadh* as a metaphor for social change, Dillon points to this wailing by women, their '*ochóning* and *ologóning*', as ineffectual in addressing problems.[153] With this metaphorical allusion to Ireland's conflicts, Dillon, following her father's example, advocates the necessity to let go of the past and instead to engage in positive development. Her cast of strong women characters demonstrate their capabilities, despite being ignored in decision making and being subject to the disparaging male complaints about their '*ramaishing*' (talking rubbish).[154] In remarking that 'there's men's talk and there's women's talk', the males imply that their own conversation is superior.[155] However, Dillon's womenfolk simply ignore the men's criticisms and retrieve the situation. In *The Sea Wall*, Old Sally, one of Dillon's strong female characters, dispenses remarkable wisdom in the face of opposition, rouses the women of the island and goads them into action. In *The House on the Shore*, Anna takes charge leading the 'women to the rescue' and orchestrating an orderly response to a male-created crisis that led to a death. Female common sense prevails and the women berate the men for their role in this despicable act. The men, ashamed of their actions, regret their earlier dismissal of the women and admit: 'We said they should be at home darning our socks'. Despite being traditionally seen as symbols of bad luck on the sea, these women, for once, take their rightful place alongside the men in the boats on the journey home.[156] Dillon not only promotes women as equal companions to their husbands but also as soul mates. This sense of closeness is articulated in *The Lost Island*, when an islander equates the companionship of his wife to that of his boat, his prized possession, also given female status: 'You can say what you like to her, the same as you would do to your wife'.[157] However, the women's show of quiet strength is never at the expense of their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers, and Dillon poses the question: 'What is a home without a mother?' She describes their many tasks; ranging from the creation of 'Christmas mottoes' to the making of soda bread and intensive spring cleaning and spinning. All of these chores are undertaken by the women with good grace, while showing devotion to their children, understanding their growth to adulthood and holding bravely to the improbable dream of their emigrant sons coming home.[158]

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[153] Dillon, *Fort* 13. These Irish words describe crying sounds.
[154] Dillon, *Fort* 23.
[155] Dillon, *A Herd of Deer* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970) 60.
[156] Dillon, *The House on the Shore* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955) 114; 155; 204.
[157] Dillon, *The Lost Island* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952) (1st ed.) This ed. (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1986) 77.

Dillon's final book in this genre, *The Island of Ghosts* (1989), marks a significant development in her approach by including young females who play a central role. AJ Piesse sees this book, with its 'careful treatment of issues of tradition', as providing 'new territories of nuance in children's writing'. The girls in the story, in direct defiance of island tradition and superstition, learn to sail, thereby taking on a leadership role. Piesse points to a departure in Dillon's style, when young Cáit is given the role of narrator, hence serving 'to underscore the quietly observed tensions about gendered tradition, expectation and performance'. The story, in reflecting changed attitudes to women and new technological advancements in a modern Ireland, indicates future possibilities but always with a respect for the traditions from which they grew. Piesse asserts that Dillon 'had a shrewd idea' of new developments in children's literature and that she had begun to reflect the compromise between the old and the new that was required for a new generation of readers.[159] Dillon's dedication of this book to her young grand-daughter, may indicate a didactic aspiration for the young women of Ireland's future to assert themselves appropriately to the benefit of modern society. The central message of the novel is that the ghosts of the past, and their sometimes crippling presence for individuals and the nation, would have to be laid to rest in an effort to progress. At the end of the book, in a message of reconciliation articulated with intent elsewhere in Dillon's work for both children and adults, the men are encouraged by the women not to wreak revenge on their enemy.

History – A Message of Reconciliation

With the old antagonisms that raged beneath the veneer of politics through the early twentieth century ever-present in her memory, Dillon continuously points out the lessons to be learned through this island preserve of Irish culture and tradition. In these children's books, Dillon gently approaches nationalist tensions that bubbled just under the surface of people's lives, with the intention of exhorting young Irish people to embrace a peaceful future. Anxious to overcome the country's self-consciousness about its past, Dillon includes overt messages through which she can engender the new level of confidence that she believes is essential to children and, by extension, to the nation itself.

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[158] Dillon, *Fort* 79; 79; 95; 5; 98.

[159] AJ Piesse, "Islands, Ireland and the changing state of writing for children," *Treasure Islands, Studies in Children's Literature,* eds. Mary Shine Thompson & Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) 154; 160.

Dillon's novel, *The Seals*, set in 1920 and published in 1969, is significant since it depicts the War of Independence as an actual historical event rather than a mere backdrop and, as such, is a departure from her usual adventure stories.[160] The novel forms a commentary for children on Ireland's military struggle and the need for eventual reconciliation between enemies. In this book, Dillon underlines the difference between nationalism as expressed in a revolutionary context and the form it would assume in an independent Ireland. Although giving voice to the nationalist spirit, she also explains through her characters that violence, while an inevitability of its time, is not acceptable in the modern age. Ger Galvin claims that Dillon inserts her views within 'an intended surface ideology', in addition to 'quietly passing on unexamined assumptions about the ethics of militarism'.[161] He assumes that 'a partisan history lesson was foremost in Dillon's mind' when she was creating the storyline.[162] However this ignores Dillon's genuine efforts to reflect the diviseness that arose both within her own family as well as across the country and the opposing viewpoints that had to be accommodated. Ciara Ní Bhroin also sees in this novel 'an overt nationalism' that is 'aimed at decolonizing the minds of Irish children'.[163] Indeed; readers of Dillon's work cannot fail to recognise the didactic nature of her message, particularly in *The Seals,* as she counterbalances past militarism with the need for peace and future reconciliation. However, by contextualising the battle for freedom within the continuum of resistance to British rule, Dillon places it at the end of a long and bitter struggle that had inevitably become part of folk memory, as well as part of her own family memory. She posits in *The Seals,* as she does in other writings, that it was the

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[160] Dillon, *The Seals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969).

[161] Ger Galvin, "Imagining Rebellion: Ideology, Identity and the Construction of Conflict in Children's Fictions of the Troubles 1913-1921," MA thesis (St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 2009) 11.

[162] Galvin 10.

[163] Ciara Ní Bhroin, "Imagining Ireland for Children: A Postcolonial Perspective of Irish Children's Literature," MA thesis (St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 2003) 1; 7.

'knowledge of thousands of long-dead heroes' who fought for Ireland that excused more recent military actions. Dillon's narrative voice relates how this was so deeply engrained in the Irish psyche, that the children 'were Fenians before they were born' and thus were part of a long and irrepressible struggle.[164] This thought may have been prompted by the family memory of Count Plunkett's early initiation into the spirit of rebellion by the visit of two drummers from the 1798 Rebellion to his home, thereby implicitly passing on the mantle of resistance from heroes of one Irish rebellion to a supporter of the next.[165]

In *The Seals*, Dillon as narrator, in the language of romantic nationalism, explains with pride and didactic intent, the attitude and the resolve of the Irish people through successive generations: 'They had never been enslaved. There was always a leader, and there were always songs of hope to light up their spirits and to start the usual pattern of plot and rising and death and defeat'.[166] She describes how it was seen as an honour and a privilege to fight for one's country when the character Morgan regrets that he had 'never got a chance to strike a blow' for Ireland. In fact, he regards it 'a piece of luck' for the young men who could do so. Similarly, young Jerry Lynskey, once given the opportunity to help out, recognises this and demonstrates his delight as his 'eyes were shining and dancing, like someone who has been promised a very special treat'. Dillon shows admiration of such courage, noting that 'there are more important things than to be safe'.[167] She is later careful to inject a note of realism into the story as a counterbalance to the romantic nationalism as previously described. The character, James Hernon, remarks on the seeming futility of the military effort:

> "Our whole war is madness", said James. "Our soldiers are farmers and fishermen and city clerks and students. Our arms are fifty years old.

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[164] Dillon, *Seals* 15; 35.
[165] Plunkett, *All in the Blood* 5. As recounted, two passing visitors to his home, men known as 'the Big Drummer and the Little Drummer,' present at Vinegar Hill, Co. Wexford during the 1798 Rising, held him as a newborn baby.
[166] Dillon, *Seals* 15.
[167] Dillon, *Seals* 65; 66; 107; 119.

> Our ammunition is mostly songs and ballads about the heroes of other days".[168]

Dillon not only had the benefit of family memory of the troubled early decades of the twentieth century but also the hindsight of knowing that this was to be the final push towards national independence. She uses this knowledge to justify the fighting to her young audience who, in 1969, would have little experience of such determined resistance. Roddy Conneeley, the freedom fighter, confirms this saying 'if we can hold out for a short time more, we'll have peace in the country at last'. Justification for war is also provided in Dillon's description of the Black and Tans as 'desperadoes' who engaged in 'torturing, killing and raiding'.[169] Faced with such horror, it seems logical that Irish nationalists had no option but to stiffen their resolve and resist. Dillon does not emphasise their more ruthless deeds in this children's book, since it was her stated intention 'not to harrow children's feelings too much'.[170]

However, she projects some sense of the anxiety she had felt as a child, of what 'The Tans' could and would do, likening them to 'some queer kind of animal', a constant menace, threatening, and with 'narrowed eyes, twirling their revolvers'. The misunderstanding of their name by the island people as 'Blackened Hands' captures their reputation for burning and killing.[171] This association is overlooked by one commentator who mistakenly attributes Dillon's connection in her novels of the word 'black' with danger, as part of a tendency towards racism. Quoting from Dillon's adult novel *The Bitter Glass,* Deirdre O'Byrne refers to the character Nora and her nightly imaginings of being attacked by black hands.[172] It is highly unlikely that any racist connotation was intended since Dillon was referring to the blackness of the terrifying nights of her childhood and also to the Black and Tans who ransacked her family home. Dillon was greatly influenced by that event which she claimed to remember with clarity. Equally the statistical details presented in her mother's eye-witness account of the scale of the damage inflicted in September 1921 – the various attacks, arrests, deportations, raids on houses, as well as threats to her family's safety and the necessity to flee their home – were impressed on her mind.[173]

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[168] Dillon, *Seals* 39.
[169] Dillon, *Seals* 119; 15.
[170] Dillon, 33337, "Irish Books" 21.
[171] Dillon, *Seals* 97; 99; 83.
[172] Deirdre O'Byrne, "One of Themselves Class Divisions in Eilís Dillon's fiction," *No Country for Old Men: Fresh Perspectives on Irish Literature,* Ser. Reimagining Ireland 4, eds. Paddy Lyons & Alison O'Malley-Younger (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008) 244.

Yet, always cautious, Dillon does not allow accounts of violence to dominate this or indeed her other books, emphasising instead the more everyday challenges rather than the impulse to resist. In a romanticised description, she stresses that while the struggle continued, people did not lose sight of what was important; the old values of mutual support, neighbourliness and kindness. Living by their wits and their hard work, they take solace in their language, the simple comfort of fresh soda bread, the turf fire burning in the hearth, the door standing open in welcome and the 'steady, slow ticking of the big wall clock'. This strong sense of community solidarity in *The Seals* is a lesson to the nation as a whole, the means by which Ireland can move forward when the fighting is finally over. Although the newly-independent Ireland may still be tainted by what went before, it will be necessary to erase old habits in order to progress. In a symbolic gesture, when the Black and Tan officers leave the cottage, young Pat, feeling that 'the ghosts of the men were still there', helps to clear the things off the table and wipe it clean'.[174] Old animosities would similarly have to be laid aside, if not forgotten, as nothing would be achieved by looking back to the horror and trauma of the past.

The theme of forgiveness features prominently in the novel with the rehabilitation of the Lynskey family, who were branded as untrustworthy, since one of their ancestors had been labelled as an 'informer', with all the attendant opprobrium that the title implies in an Irish context. Their good name is retrieved when the young boys invite young Jerry Lynskey to be part of their adventure and he proves his worth. Significantly, it is the children who enable this reconciliation to take place in the story. Through this, Dillon is demonstrating to her young readers how a new generation in a modern Ireland must learn to forgive the damaging events of the past and to embrace tolerance.

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[173] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 284. Her account states that 14,000 houses were raided, 260 people wounded and eight civilians killed.

[174] Dillon, *Seals* 97; 111.

One reviewer of *The Seals* recommends this story for Irish children as 'it will aptly illustrate the tales their fathers tell them, if indeed fathers are still telling tales of 1916 and the Civil War'.[175] Perhaps it is due to the absence of stories being told by veterans traumatised by their experiences, that Dillon felt a responsibility to educate her audience. It is interesting that, despite such obvious intent, she strongly warns against didacticism. At a conference in 1981, she states:

> The most obvious problem with children's literature is that so many writers are tempted to be didactic, to keep on and on pointing to a moral, dropping the philosophical principle that all art must stand on its own feet and be independent of lessons and morals.[176]

She rejects any such tendency in her own stories, claiming that 'there is no need to hammer home the message' and she further explains, somewhat ambiguously, that even if she 'had suffered from this temptation', the down-to-earth nature of the characters in her rural setting left her 'free to attend to the artistic side'.[177] However, it is clear from her novels that the moralising tone, which she disliked so much in others, features throughout her work. Dillon's urge to communicate knowledge of the past to her child readers is matched by her eagerness to instil confidence and pride in them. In doing both, she takes on a mentoring role in leading them towards maturity.

Dillon returns to inherent moralising regarding issues of reconciliation later in other stories for children, in which she accentuates this sense of moving away from violence of any sort. In the beautifully written short story *Bad Blood* (1984) that Dunbar sees as 'the key to understanding Dillon's writing', she consolidates her views on this spirit of forgiveness.[178] John, the young protagonist, although accused in the wrong regarding a fishing incident, concedes to his elderly neighbour. He gives the fish that he is accused of stealing back to him, deciding that to do otherwise would only add to 'the bad blood' within the community and that future generations would some day 'curse this little fish if he allowed it to stir up further the ill-feeling between them'.[179] Dillon, here and in other stories, portrays older men who cling to their confrontational ways as anachronistic within the modern world, in which discussion and compromise are more acceptable ways towards peaceful resolution. Roddy, in *The House on the Shore,* asserts that the Irish, when entrenched in the old ways, are not inclined to be 'a peace-loving, forgiving people'. He admits his culpability in the 'bad business' of helping to burn down the house of the miser, Uncle Martin. This realisation is prompted through the wisdom of his son and he reluctantly agrees that it is 'a terrible thing when a grown man has to learn sense from his son'.[180] This echoes a real incident in which Dillon's husband, Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, participated during the War of Independence. It involved an arson attack on a Big House, something she said he felt very badly about afterwards.[181]

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[175] Marie Louise Colbert, "Perfect Yarn," *Hibernia Magazine* [Dublin] June 1969, in Dillon, 33340.
[176] Dillon, "Literature" 10.
[177] Dillon, "Literature" 10.
[178] Dunbar, Interview.

Nonetheless, in many of Dillon's novels, the young people, while showing awareness of the romantic notion of warfare held by previous generations, are not inclined to take part themselves. For example, in *A Herd of Deer,* young Peter, through memories imparted to him by his grandfather, understands that as young nationalists 'they had great times, out fighting the Black and Tans, sleeping in sheds and under haystacks, telling stories, singing songs'. Peter is surprised at how the old men 'look so wild and lively' when they talk about it, but recognises the tendency to forget about the bullets at this remove of time. Continuing in this vein, and writing at a time when violence was re-erupting in Northern Ireland, Dillon uses her characters to warn of the danger that clinging to old ideas would result in 'rivers of blood' flowing through the kitchen. But as the character Patsy reminds us, in a reference to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, 'Threats and guns are not needed. That was decided. We all agreed'.[182] Dillon once again relays the family opinions repeatedly heard in her childhood, of how a return to violence would be a travesty of all that had gone before. She continually iterates these views, presenting the rational, political solution as a preferable alternative to the military approach, while also explaining that extenuating circumstances sometimes lead intelligent people to adopt violent means. This emphasis on conciliation is in keeping with Ní Bhroin's conclusion that Dillon's stories are 'transitional in their emphasis on moving forward to a future of new opportunities and economic prosperity'.[183] Dillon planted in the reader's mind a sense of pride in the past, alongside a vision of what was possible in the future, both for the individual and for the nation as a whole.

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[179] Dillon, *The Lucky Bag*, "Bad Blood" 79.
[180] Dillon, *The House on the Shore* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955) 146; 203.
[181] Dillon, Writing http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/03.EdResearch.html.
[182] Dillon, *Herd* 45; 64; 101.

Historical Fiction for Children

The Seals provides Dillon's most overt comment on an Irish historical event in her children's fiction since in general, she chooses simply to allude to the memory of significant events, rather than to describe them.[184] Dunbar, believing that writers who concentrate on history very often 'lose the literary dimension', feels that Eilís Dillon succeeded where others failed, as she never allowed history to become detrimental to her characterisation or storyline.[185] Dillon had also deliberately avoided writing disturbing historical details for children and justifies this, particularly in relation to the Irish Famine, as too painful to address, even for her adult readership. She explains that while it is permissable to give characters 'problems from an outside source - war or murder, or theft or death and see how they deal with them', she believes that in children's books, the problems that are encountered should be ones that can be resolved within the community.[186] There is a sense that while eager to introduce children to the past, she simultaneously wanted to protect them from it. Ironically, in 1990, it was *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Marita Conlon McKenna, a book dealing with the Famine, the topic that Dillon consciously avoided, that brought Irish children's historical fiction to the fore.[187]

Valerie Coghlan, writing about the emergence of historical fiction for children, notes that this genre accounted for approximately one-third of the best-selling children's books in Ireland during the 1990s. She refers not only to Conlon McKenna but also to the work of Elizabeth O'Hara who wrote about the Hiring

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[183] Ní Bhroin 8.
[184] Dillon, *Herd* 86.
[185] Dunbar, Interview.
[186] Dillon, "Literature" 13-4.
[187] Marita Conlon McKenna, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1990).

Fairs, and to Siobhán Parkinson and Gerard Whelan who dealt with the events of 1916. In particular, she highlights the work of Mark O'Sullivan and Aubrey Flegg and their portrayal of the Irish Civil War, 'which still has resonance in modern Irish politics'. Coghlan asserts that appreciation of 'the richness of the past, and the greater freedom now allowed by the passing of time and the distancing of old antagonisms', had contributed to the popularity of the historical novel, which was a safe vehicle 'to show conflict and imperfection'. These writers, a generation younger than Dillon, were further removed in time from painful associations with historical events. This is supported by Coghlan's view that maturation allowed Irish writers to tackle subjects that had, until then, been seen as contentious, shameful and 'too emotionally-loaded and too controversial to make appropriate reading for young people'.[188] It was true that the explosion of historical fiction in Irish publishing came at a time of relative prosperity in Ireland and at a distance in time from the actual events described. However, as Celia Keenan points out, only some writers engaged in detailed historical narrative, and topics were treated with varying and uneven degrees of accuracy. She regards Michael Mullen and Tom McCaughren as belonging to a small group of Irish writers, 'who set a very high premium on telling the truth about history, on faithfulness to the record', although sometimes at the expense of 'energy and drive' in the stories.[189] Many other writers merely used historical events as a backdrop and as a storytelling device. Dillon had been ground-breaking within Irish children's literature for her choice of topic in *The Seals* in 1969 and in opening up the historical memory of events of the early twentieth century, but she failed to return to it in her subsequent children's books. Nonetheless, while avoiding harrowing historical detail, she continued with her intermittent didactic reminders of past glories or defeats, often overriding her own maxim 'not to hammer the message home'.[190]

Dillon's last book for children, *The Children of Bach*, is unusual in that its protagonists live under the very real threat of violence and death, as they are forced to flee their native Hungary during World War II. The core belief in this novel is that 'there is more good than evil in the world' and, as with the island stories, it is the innate goodness of the characters, their unity and mutual responsibility, that saves them. Dillon's message is clear and is applicable to all nations and situations: 'You must learn to forget the bad things and remember the good ones'. This lesson appears facile considering the real horrors of the war throughout Europe and the attempted extermination of the Jewish people, something to which Dillon, rather pointedly, never alludes. Instead, in keeping with her policy of protecting child readers from trauma, Dillon takes an easier path in this book, by focusing on the loss of national identity with the sense of alienation that arises when people are forced to live in a different culture: 'When you change countries there are a thousand things you never find out'.[191]

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[188] Coghlan 163–4; 166, 167; 163.
[189] Celia Keenan, "Telling Lies to Children is Wrong. Does Irish Historical Fiction tell the Truth?" Lecture, Dublin City Public Library, Pearse Street (Autumn, 2004) 10 May 2011 www.librarycouncil.ie/publications/pdf/ILN244.pdf.
[190] Dillon, "Literature" 10.

It is disappointing that Dillon did not avail of an opportunity to tackle the history of the time with greater realism in contrast to international writers, who had ably undertaken treatments of some of the harsh realities of the war and its consequences. Most notably, Anne Holm had written in 1963 about an escape from a concentration camp in *I am David*, and Judith Kerr had told the story of the escape of a Jewish family from Germany in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, published in 1971. By baulking at treating deeper and more sensitive issues in *Children of Bach*, Dillon misses an opportunity to excel in creating a work of meaningful commemoration of these young dispossessed people. However, the book, in other ways, can be read as a work of reminiscence, with parallels from Dillon's own life. It is appropriately a homage to memory; the memory of a lost home, a lost nation, lost identity, lost loved ones, a lost childhood and, very poignantly, the loss of Dillon's daughter Máire, a musician, to whom the novel is dedicated. In her memory, Dillon focuses on the healing power of music, a belief possibly derived from the solace that she discovered from her own experience in learning the cello at a difficult time in her life. *Children of Bach* is also unusual in that Dillon introduces young love between a girl and boy, both wavering on the cusp of adulthood. This indicates a development on Dillon's earlier approach and points to a possible change of direction, but one that came at the end of her writing career. While the failure to engage in greater emotional exploration within much of her work for children may be seen as a lost opportunity, this novel indicates a continued willingness on Dillon's part to experiment with her writing and to aim consistently to achieve, this time in a European setting.

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[191] Dillon, *The Children of Bach* (New York: Scribner, 1992) 69; 175; 62.

Conclusion

Dillon, in selecting suitable reading for children, indicates the personal, moral, social and political criteria that she applied to children's literature in general and, by implication, to her own work. Her motivation in pursuing a selectively didactic approach has been explained through her memory of authors whose work she had read and whom she admired for their ability to portray nationalism in a convincingly instructional manner. Her continuous depiction of an idealised rural childhood of adventure, her presentation of resourceful protagonists and her emphasis on peace and reconciliation, all point to an ideological stance that made her writing educative, informative and aspirational. Her memory of childhood freedom in the west allowed her to present her young readers with protagonists who, confident and self-reliant in a landscape of possibilities, are models for future citizens in the new Ireland, as envisaged by the founders of the State. Yet her silence on certain traumatic episodes in Ireland's history in her writing for children is noteworthy. It seems likely that her own early experiences proved to be significant in her commitment to protecting children from descriptions of disturbing events, but their omission from her work is unfortunate. Dillon might have used her early memories, however vivid and traumatic, as well as some of the more difficult aspects of island life, to explain very effectively to a young audience the ability of the human mind to face extreme challenge, and to accommodate, become reconciled to or even to overcome one's worst fears. Equally, with her descriptive ability and insight, she could have written about other challenging issues with sensitivity and compassion, in a manner suited to a child readership. Through her adventure stories, Dillon chose instead to provide an escape to an idyllic location, where children, unburdened by harsh external realities, are free to explore at least their challenging physical surroundings, if not their innermost feelings.

Inevitably, Dillon's presentation of this traditional, literary rural paradise involves what Krips describes as a 'selective and reworked remembering'. This enables Dillon, if not to fully 'animate the inanimate and bring tradition back to life', then, at a minimum, to give it an enduring presence in the memory of the reader.[192] Dunbar summarises this when he observes, 'It's about memory; it's about nostalgia'.[193] Dillon consistently indulged in her chosen personal memories, and the following vivid and romantic view of her schooldays and the delights of reading, carefully omits any of the difficulties referred to earlier:

> The sunny days of May and June were a pure delight, when we could read in bed by daylight until eleven at night, when the gardens bloomed with roses and flowering shrubs and the trees were heavy with chestnut flowers, when the cows moved slowly in line up the long field, their black and white pattern glinting in the sun, when we sang May hymns to the Virgin in the chapel every evening and when the heavenly prospect of soon going home filled us with excitement.[194]

In transmitting both personal and family memories, she allows her young readers to experience vicariously their national heritage and a way of life that was gone and impossible to recreate. Through her stories, set in an indefinable past, a new generation could discover a people in a particular landscape, as well as their language, customs, traditions and the inherent nobility they possessed, which Dillon sought to present. This, she must have hoped, would ensure a retention of this image that she believed represented true Irishness, if only attainable nostalgically by adults remembering a pleasurable childhood reading experience. In a metaphor for the spark of Irish identity and nationalist spirit, Dillon's young characters are regularly warned: 'Don't let the fire go out. That fire hasn't gone out in a hundred years'.[195] These books, in keeping that flame alive, acted for the author as an insurance policy, should the collective memory of the developing nation fail to acknowledge this traditional island life, materially poorer but, as Dillon saw it, blessed with cultural richness.

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[192] Krips 25.
[193] Dunbar, Interview.
[194] Dillon, *Inside* 157– 8.
[195] Dillon, *Herd* 106.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin echoes the positive outlook towards internationalism that both Eilís and Geraldine shared. Writing of her mother's work, she notes that despite the insular setting, 'the Ireland she writes about is a place wide open to Europe and the world' and that the children in her stories are on the 'first stage of a journey which may end anywhere'.[196] Eilís Dillon too, was on her own journey, a literary journey that she saw as culminating in her success as a writer of historical fiction for an adult readership. Always eager to live up to the high standards demanded of her from a young age, Dillon sought to forge a successful career in adult literature. While she encouraged the growth of confidence in Irish children, she too needed confidence to approach this challenge 'without fear' and with a greater depth suited to adults.[197] Her journey will be examined in Chapter Four.

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[196] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, "The wild and the tame" 192.
[197] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 11.

Chapter Four

Remembered Settings in Adult Fiction

Introduction

While continuing to show commitment and dedication to children's literature, but possibly prompted by the usual higher status accorded to adult writing and the greater critical attention that it attracted, Dillon decided from the mid 1950s onwards, to simultaneously pursue a career as a writer for adults. Her considerable body of work within a number of adult genres forms a significant part of the overview that is provided in this thesis. This chapter, one of two dealing with adult fiction, follows the trajectory of Dillon's progression as a writer as she apprenticed herself through the short story and through her crime and literary novels. This preparatory phase was instrumental in helping Dillon to achieve her ultimate goal, which was to establish herself as a critically acclaimed writer both in Ireland and internationally. Her experimentation with genres in the early stages of her career led to what she regarded as the culmination of her achievements in the sphere of historical fiction, a genre which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. The writings from this early phase demonstrate her reliance on remembered settings within large houses and her tendency to depict an earlier era, even within what she regarded as contemporary novels.

Her work is presented here in contrast to emerging trends in the area of fiction in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It will be assessed not only for its ability to provide the adult reader with a quality and interesting reading experience but also, in the context of this thesis, for the author's continued proclivity towards retrospection and her dependence on individual and collective family memory of a disappearing lifestyle. In her children's fiction, Dillon evokes the image of a people whose lifestyle was being subsumed into, or replaced by, that of modern Ireland. In a parallel manner, she depicts for her adult readers a particular way of life within town and country house settings which, although radically different from the peasant world of the islands, was one that was becoming equally anachronistic in the twentieth century.

The designation 'crime novel' is used with reference to three of Dillon's works, although not in the current sense of suspenseful thrillers with dynamic private investigators and convoluted plots. Publicity material from *The Rue Morgue Press* explains this very well. This specialist publishing house professes, with intended irony, dedication to the idea of reprinting 'mysteries for little old ladies of all ages and sexes' and books that adhere to 'the tradition which first came to prominence during the Golden Age of detective fiction (1920–1940)'.[1] The re-publication of Dillon's novels by this publisher affirms her status within the genre but nonetheless positions her work, with its style, content and assumed audience, within an earlier era. While the term 'literary' has a broad interpretation and can be used in a general sense about a great deal of Dillon's work, it is used here specifically in relation to two books that Dillon saw as part of her training in writing good literature, and which are classified by her son as 'literary' or sometimes 'psychological' works.[2] The term literary is a broad one but is understood within this chapter as pertaining to writings of artistic merit that can be defined and valued as 'having excellence of form or expression' and therefore worthy of critical study.[3]

Although this chapter focuses mainly on Dillon's crime and literary novels and the settings and characters within them, it also discusses relevant short stories, some of them unpublished. These are included for study as they provide evidence of Dillon's capabilities within the genre, as well as her approach to writing, which contrasted with that of many of her contemporaries. The short stories also include material that is emotive and clearly autobiographical, thereby helping to highlight some facets of the author's life and work.

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[1] Rue Morgue Press Website, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/about.html.
[2] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, Eilís Dillon, Author Profile, Rue Morgue Press (2009) 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors/dillon.html.
[3] 'Literary,' *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1 July 2011 http://oxforddictionaries.com/page/oxfordenglishdictionary.

Dillon and the Short Story

Like other writers after World War II, Dillon found herself at a turning point in her writing career. As she describes it, 'all our experience became useless, or so I thought'. Having left her earlier influences behind, she felt that she had to start all over again and wondered what she could write about once the 'horrors' of the war were over.[4]

Dillon, as noted earlier, was enormously influenced by O'Faoláin and admired his versatility and sheer devotion to writing. She recalls how her generation 'always watched in admiration and awe while he turned his hand to one thing after another': translations of old Irish poetry, travel books, history, biography, television programmes, as well as the short story, for which he was widely acclaimed.[5] Dillon also identified with O'Faoláin through their mutual experiences of the revolutionary movement; hers indirect and at the remove of a generation, his as a participant.[6] While he felt an obligation to recount 'the often stormy history of twentieth-century Ireland from his personal perspective', he managed, with some difficulty, to unfetter himself of his links with the past and to attain 'a certain adjustment and detachment'.[7] O'Faoláin warned of the danger of 'past worship' and of clinging to 'an outmoded, antique past', and asserted that 'the value of writers in any country is that they revolt against a tradition by instinct, as soon as it is exhausted'.[8] In doing this himself, he could then accept a country 'not dead but sleeping', its life 'broken and hardly breathing'.[9] He recognised the confused, disorganised Ireland, 'caught symbolically in a snowstorm of blindness, of depression, of obfuscation' and, unlike Dillon, sought to address this new reality.[11] Both O'Faoláin and O'Connor, committed to their country but simultaneously alienated from its modern incarnation, saw post-independent Ireland as 'a broken world' of 'sectionalism, puritanism, philistanism, anti-intellectualism, and censorship', and considered the short story as the most suitable genre through which to portray this fragmented society.[12]

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[4] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 9.

[5] Dillon, 33329, " Young Writer" 41.

[6] O'Faoláin was a Volunteer in the War of Independence and fought during the Civil War on the Republican side.

[7] Obituary of Seán O'Faoláin, *New York Times,* 22 Apr. 1991, 10 Oct. 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/22/obituaries/sean-o-faolain-an-irish-master-of-the-short-story-is-dead-at-91.html.

[8] Seán O'Faoláin, "The Death of Nationalism," *The Bell* XVII (2 May 1952) ed. Peadar O'Donnell.

[9] Seán O'Faoláin, "A Broken World," *A Purse of Coppers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937) 27.

[11] Paul A. Doyle, *Seán O'Faoláin* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968) 78.

Believing that artistic realism could not be sustained over the length of the novel, O'Connor maintained that Irish material was, in general, 'too uninspiring, provincial, and empty to provide the proper climate for novelists', unlike the short story which could reflect society with clarity.[13] Moreover, he saw the short story as much more of an art form, a 'pure' means of storytelling, which never attempts to narrate 'the totality of a human life' but through carefully chosen episodes, 'lit by an earthly glow', can 'show the present, past and future as though they were all contemporaries'.[14] Many of the successful short-story writers of the middle of the twentieth century were forthright in the face of their critics and the possible censorship of their publications. They tackled the social issues of the time – holding up a mirror to sexual inhibition, the role of women in Ireland and the dominance of the Catholic Church. Writer Mary Lavin, while having written two novels, similarly viewed the genre as 'too ambitious', seeing the short story as aiming at 'a particle of truth' and providing discipline, as well as a combination of imagination and technique. Lavin, with a knowledge of the power of the short story, stated, 'I felt I had too much to say to be a novelist'.[15] Dillon, with a very different aim, took an opposing view, consistently declaring an antipathy towards the short story and declaring it as 'too narrow' for her purposes.[16] In this, she engaged in the dangers of allowing what Lavin called 'unrestricted range' to impede her narratives.[17] Despite her protestations, Dillon appears to have been tantalised by the short story form and returned to it at various stages during her writing career. Her reluctance to be published in the genre may have been due to an inherited strong sense of propriety. Alleging to dream of one day having her own work banned in order to be seen as a successful writer, Dillon was not comfortable to publicly address the contentious subjects with which many modern Irish writers courageously engaged in the short story.[18] Despite her misgivings, she nonetheless made many attempts to write short stories during her career. Only a few of them were published, notably "Bad Blood", "A Housekeeper", "The Turning" and "The Cure", the latter written in 1960 and published thirty-two years later.[19] From the existing examples, it is evident that the short story had a disciplining effect on Dillon's writing, causing it to be less descriptive and more concise in style than that of her novels.

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[12] John Wilson Foster, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 17.
[13] Frank O'Connor, "The Future of Irish Literature," *Horizon* V (Jan. 1942): 59–63.
[14] Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963) 22.
[15] Maurice Harmon, "From Conversations with Mary Lavin," *Irish University Review* 27.2 (Autumn–Winter, 1997): 287–292, 15 July 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25484734.
[16] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 41.
[17] Harmon 288.

The allegorical "Butterflies" is an example of Dillon's ability to address succinctly in the short story one of the recurring themes of her fiction. In a metaphor for the challenge faced by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in acceding to the emerging middle classes of a new Ireland, Dillon describes the desecration of former grandeur, when the Major's beloved collection of native butterflies is destroyed and replaced with a hybrid stock.[20] The Major, representative of upper-class breeding and the manners of an Anglo-Irish lifestyle, is humiliated, disillusioned and insulted at the contamination of the butterflies, symbols of a reliable and established world, by the culprit film-makers who, representative of crass modernisation, are only concerned with fleeting images and material gain. In this story, Dillon displays in some of her descriptions the wit which often becomes submerged in her longer works of fiction. Her comment about the floor covering as 'battleship linoleum', 'guaranteed to last thirty years or until the ship went down, whichever was soonest', injects a note of humour. Significantly, it is also in another short story that Dillon demonstrates perhaps the most vehement and gritty example of her writing.

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[18] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 41.

[19] Dillon, "Bad Blood" (1958); Dillon, *The Lucky Bag* (1984).
A Housekeeper was published in *The Daily Telegraph Magazine* 466 [London] 5 Oct. 1973.
The Turning (1978) was published in *Tri-Quarterly*, Northwestern University, Illinois, 1980. *The Cure* (1960) was published by The Samaritans in 1992 as part of a fundraising initiative.

[20] Dillon, 33264, "Butterflies". The story was published in *Boulevard Magazine* (1986) St Louis University, USA, but may have been written many years earlier.

"Snobbery", a hand-written and undated work, probably better described as a memoir, is the undisguised real-life and very emotive narrative of the young Eilís Dillon, working as a housemaid in Dublin hotels.[21] The work is a bitter diatribe against a mother's cruelty in depriving her daughter of further education and exposing her to the life of a servant, a role that was highly unusual for someone of her class.[22] The mother in the story describes this daughter as 'bright', unlike her sisters who 'had brains' and were intelligent and therefore requiring education, while this girl was more akin to the servants in their home. The writing is very revealing about Dillon herself. The harsh reality of the 'fictional' situation is described with a rawness not seen in her published work, and the sheer misery of that time is conveyed with a directness that is not tempered with her usual lyricism. For once, because the story is so personally written, she does not spare the reader from sordid detail. The narrator, remembering her job emptying chamber pots, recalls that 'the world was composed of pee, its smell, its texture, its colour, so many different colours and qualities'. In addition, in writing that is uncharacteristic of Dillon elsewhere, she describes the largely undiscussed reality of the times, of 'little rubber things not obtainable in holy Ireland' but 'enough of them that summer to block the drains'.[23]

A mood of isolation and of alienation from family pervades the story, as does the sense of injustice caused by being propelled into this other world. The protagonist considers suicide by jumping into the canal and imagines what a coroner would make of a girl of her class being coerced into such work. This sense of shame seems allied to the writer's own inherited notions of class as the narrator admits that, if her friends were to find out about her circumstances, 'she would die of shame'. The girl's upper-class origins are confirmed by her workmates who remark that 'anyone could tell a mile off that she was a lady'. The story has all the hallmarks of Dillon's own experience, but also has undisguised references to the Plunketts' building enterprises, her grandparents' book-filled house, the family dynamic within it and, most revealingly, her mother's irrational behaviour. The issue of failing to read early enough to satisfy family expectations is also included. In a conspicuous reference to the author's childhood trauma, the narrator refers to the Black and Tans taking her mother away, commenting that 'there is something unseemly about seeing your mother yelling, even in a good cause'. A possible echo of Dillon's feeling of family estrangement in her younger life is also expressed in the statement: 'Families know better than anyone how to torment a person'. However, in *Cinderella*-like fashion, the story ends happily, as did Dillon's own early life, with rescue by an older man. The narrator leaves Dublin for a southern village and meets a tall black-haired man, fifteen years her senior, 'kinder gentler and cleverer' than anyone she had ever met in her life, who asks her to marry him. The decision to accept the proposal causes a change in the girl's relationship with family members who begin to speak to her 'more kindly than they had ever done in their lives'. The mother's only concern is to know if the marriage would be in time to avail of an income tax rebate in April, and is pleased that the young fiancé, a university lecturer, has a big salary, a house with several spare rooms and would 'breed good sight back into the family'. With a further direct comparison to Dillon's own situation, the young man resolves, as Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin Senior did, to provide her with a housekeeper in their new home to do the housework for her because 'she was tired and needed a long rest'.[24] Years later, Dillon recalled in interview that at the time of her initial encounter with her future husband in Ardmore in County Waterford, she was just 'pulling herself together again', an ambiguous comment, since it might have referred to the upheaval of the war years but was, more probably, a reference to the effects of the unfair treatment meted out by her mother.[25]

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[21] Dillon, 33266, "Snobbery".
[22] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 15.
[23] Dillon, 33266, "Snobbery".

It is unlikely that Dillon ever submitted "Snobbery" for publication as it would have proved shameful for her and, more particularly, humiliating and embarrassing for her parents, both of whom lived into old age. However, it is a significant piece of work since it indicates an emotional strength and a personal voice that eludes Dillon in her other writing, an absence that will be addressed later in this dissertation. Dillon had commended O'Faoláin's bravery in using real-life experiences in his writing but felt that the often 'scandalous' subjects that he addressed could, in the international market, 'shame us in front of the outer world'. She professed knowledge of real-life incidents that she too could easily have used, but claimed that 'washing dirty linen, giving scandal to little ones, dragging Ireland's name in the mud' was anathema to her.[26] This sense of decorum inhibited Dillon and prevented her from tackling, in a public way, the more embarrassing and cruel realities of life in Ireland in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. In seeking to avoid the more distasteful aspects of life, she took refuge in novelistic forms that avoided controversial topics and, while allegedly contemporary, were set in an earlier age.

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[24] "Kay Kent talks to Eilís Dillon," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 5 Mar. 1974.

[25] Richard Hanly, *Writer in Profile*, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, 30 June 1993, Television; also in Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 16.

Adopting the Novel

In adopting a particular perspective on the novel, Dillon engaged with Big House themes in line with Foster's description of that tradition as 'highly dependent on the country house setting, or its latter-day townhouse equivalent', and which 'took love and marriage as frequent themes and had fitful recourse to other elements of romance and even of the national tale'.[27] Edgeworth and those who followed her, in their depictions of Ascendancy Ireland and its inter-connectedness with the local Irish people, devised, as Rafroidi describes, 'the ingredients of the national fiction to come'. They wrote of the relationship between the landlord class and their tenants, the crumbling mansions that symbolised the end of Anglo-Irish identity and security, and 'the disappearance of civilised beauty and permanence'.[28] An enduring tradition evolved through successful women writers with their revealing portraits of the landlord classes, and studies of impending ruin and loss of status. Somerville and Ross, writing in the 1890s and early 1900s, exposed the linguistic and other disparities between the two traditions. Alongside their humourous depictions of Irish gentry in decline, they also highlighted

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[26] Dillon, 33329, "Young Writer" 37.

[27] Foster, *Cambridge* 19.

[28] Patrick Rafroidi, "A Question of Inheritance: The Anglo-Irish Tradition," *The Irish Novel in our Time*, eds. Patrick Rafroidi & Maurice Harmon (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1975–6) 12.

'significant land issues of the nineteenth century' including eviction, agrarian outrage, estate management and various land disputes.[29] Later, Elizabeth Bowen, writing fiction that had 'the texture of history', presented in the Big House of *The Last September* (1929), characters 'embalmed in an outdated caste system' and encumbered by a crippling financial burden, while the disaffected peasantry 'pressed their faces against the ballroom window'. The tension is heightened by knowledge of the Anglo-Irish War being waged outside.[30]

These writers had experienced, from the inside, the life of the Big House and understood its dynamic. Dillon was writing from a position of hindsight and a more limited direct knowledge of that life but had, apart from her extensive reading in the genre, anecdotal knowledge supplied by her family. She must have heard stories of the destruction of Sir Horace Plunkett's home at Kilteragh and of the fears that the Fingall Plunketts had for Killeen Castle during the early 1920s.[31] Rafroidi identifies a commonality among the writers who treat Big House themes, in their 'idealisation and naturalistic exaggeration', along with 'the will to deliver a message'.[32] The description of these settings by Maud Ellmann as 'house-islands' is particularly suited to Dillon, who had repeatedly used the island as a setting for her children's books. The location 'placed a frame around the lives of the inhabitants, providing an aesthetic in default of a rootedness'. Within this, as Ellmann describes, 'the Anglo-Irish lived like only children, isolated from the native population by religion, nationality and social class, singular, independent and secretive'.[33] While Dillon's novels do not adhere to all of the conventions of the Big House genre, she uses its tropes for her nationalist purposes. The setting may be a decaying house, but, in her big houses, there is hope for the social and political survival of its incumbents. Being of Catholic stock and nationalist in affiliation, they will survive in the newly formed State by embracing new developments. At the early stage of her career as an adult writer, Dillon borrowed from this genre, inserting elements from it into her crime and literary novels, before expanding upon it more fully in her historical fiction.

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[29] Julie Anne Stevens, *The Irish Scene in Somerville & Ross*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007) 3.

[30] Vera Kreilkamp, "Bowen: Ascendancy Modernist," *Elizabeth Bowen, Visions and Revisions*, ed. Eibhear Walshe (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009) 21.

[31] Fingall, *Seventy* 440–1.

[32] Rafroidi 15.

[33] Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen, The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) 43.

Dillon appears to have been content in this writing milieu rather than in imitating the writers of modern forms of the novel. In her books, she refers regularly to her characters' reading material, and consistently denigrates the modern novel with its blatant and, as she sees it, unnecessary sexuality. As noted in Chapter Three, Dillon had particular views on suitable reading material for children and young adults, and included some of these earlier writers on her reading list.[34] Not surprisingly, and possibly with an eye to competition, she was critical of emerging adult writers who, more direct in their treatment of sexual matters, were becoming increasingly popular with young people. In a revealing review of Edna O'Brien's stream of consciousness novel *Night*, Dillon contends that 'there is little of value in it except the occasional brilliant miniature descriptions of natural scenes in Ireland'. She is disparaging of O'Brien's 'irritatingly portentous style' and of the language as being contrived, with its 'spatterings of pointless obscenities'. Dillon accuses O'Brien of presenting a negative philosophy and 'dreary sexual speculations', included simply '*pour épater la bourgeoisie*' (in order to amaze the bourgeoisie). She also derides the 'the general lack of depth' in O'Brien's work but, even more importantly, contends that it 'is an example of the well-held theory that a writer has one main statement to make, and repeats it in one form or another throughout his life'.[35] Dillon, in criticising what she sees as O'Brien's fixation with certain themes, namely the vulnerability and exploitation of women, fails to recognise her own preoccupations with other issues. While O'Brien had the 'power to convince and shock', and was unafraid to express 'the sometimes frightful negativity of Irish women's sexual relations with men',[36] Dillon, with a sense of patriotic duty, had always been unwilling to expose to the world the disenchantment and repression that festered in Ireland in the decades that followed independence. Instead, when embarking on her career as a novelist, she made the unusual choice to become a crime writer, albeit within particular settings.

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[34] Dillon mentions Edgeworth, and Somerville and Ross as suitable reading material.
[35] Dillon, 33344, Rev. of *Night* by Edna O'Brien, *Irish Press* (undated). Handwritten note: 'The original sent to DM on 26 Sept. 1972.'
[36] Corcoran 86.

Contemporary Crime Novels

Adopting the crime genre in the early 1950s as part of what she regarded as her apprenticeship and as a means of honing her skills in adult fiction, Dillon produced three novels in quick succession: *Death at Crane's Court* (1953), *Sent to his Account* (1954) and *Death in the Quadrangle* (1956).[37] Repeating the reasons for her earlier choices of children's literature and Irish language stories, she espoused the crime genre as a way of avoiding the criticism she so greatly feared. She once again blamed the intimidating Cork cliques and their 'strongly expressed philistinism, particularly in relation to literature', as being detrimental to her as 'a determinedly apprenticed writer' and causing her to be over-cautious in choosing her starting point. Crime fiction, like children's literature, seemed a 'harmless' sort of occupation, since it allowed an entrée into adult fiction, while not attracting too much attention. She wrote: 'As detective stories were considered a respectable genre, I would be going some way towards protecting my flank against the slings and arrows of this nation of critics'.[38]

However, Dillon had ambitions to be an acclaimed writer and may have been aware that while there was an insufficient readership in Ireland to sustain crime fiction, the genre had a strong tradition elsewhere. Indeed, crime fiction, along with science fiction, ghost stories and romance, was among the most popular reading material in Britain.[39] Already published there, Dillon could begin to make her mark in popular crime fiction both at home and abroad.

These early novels are worthy of analysis, not only because they have recently been republished, but because Dillon is now acknowledged as belonging within an Irish crime-writing tradition, which is only beginning to find a strong voice in twenty-first century Ireland. While having served as the germinating ground for many of the themes and ideas expanded upon in her later novels, these early works also provide evidence of Dillon's developing style and of the narrative voice that subsequently became recognisable. The sharp criticism that Dillon had earlier received for *The Bitter Glass*, a historical novel for adults, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, may also have been a factor in her decision to avoid national issues and to adopt the crime genre.

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[37] Dillon, *Death at Crane's Court* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953); Dillon, *Sent to his Account* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); Dillon, *Death in the Quadrangle* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956).

[38] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 10.

[39] Ian Campbell Ross, Introduction, *Down these Green Streets, Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century*, ed. Declan Burke (Dublin: Liberties, 2011) 19.

Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin views his mother's 'cosy and comical' depiction of Ireland in her crime fiction as 'adopting an urbane lightly comic view of life', pointing out the foibles of Irish people 'as if from the viewpoint of a superior stranger'. He places this tendency within a long tradition of writers borrowing a foreign viewpoint - in this case an English one.[40] Ostensibly dealing with contemporary Ireland, Dillon's characters, themes and style of writing recall the lifestyle of an earlier time within settings that have an Anglo-Irish aura, with which she was familiar.

The Tradition of Irish Crime Writing

While appreciating Dillon's skills as a writer and 'her already revealed talent' within children's literature, some critics held the view that the production of adult fiction was more worthy,[41] with one reviewer commenting that the adoption of crime writing was 'likely to set its author up several rungs in the ladder of literary fame'.[42] In contrast to the limited and multi-book reviews reserved for her children's publications, these crime novels were critiqued in more depth and with a greater appreciation for the skill involved. Dillon received praise for undertaking the genre at all, particularly as a female writer.[43] However, as commentator Ian Campbell Ross explains, although there was an absence of Irish writers featured in reviews of early crime fiction, there was, in fact, a 'far from negligible' Irish tradition within the genre, which can be traced from the work of Charles Robert

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[40] Cormac Millar (aka Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin), "The Dead Generations," in Burke, *Green Streets* 113.
[41] *Irish Press* [Dublin] 10 Feb. 1953.
[42] *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 15 Mar. 1953.
[43] "Thriller Corner," *Lady Magazine* [London] 5 Mar. 1953.

Maturin, Sheridan le Fanu, Oscar Wilde and LT Meade. In Meade, Dillon might have found a role model, since she too was a 'celebrated writer of children's fiction' who also wrote crime fiction, which, unusually for the time, included female detectives and criminals. It is unclear if Dillon found inspiration in the work of her relative Lord Dunsany, author of a crime mystery drama, *The Murderers*, in 1919, but her son verifies that she was an admirer of GK Chesterton, Margery Allingham and Dorothy Sayers, while dismissing the very popular Agatha Christie for the poor 'quality of her writing'.[44] Although detective fiction had, in the mid-twentieth century, 'become a vast literary industry', it had attracted only a few of Dillon's Irish contemporaries, among them Nigel Fitzgerald, Sheila Pim and Cecil Day Lewis.[45] Dillon, having read extensively, was, as Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin describes, well equipped to take her place among them and could attempt to 'provide a local version of the established international genre' she knew so well, with what she hoped was a literary quality.[46]

Brinsley McNamara explains that the 'comparatively uncomplicated framework' of life in Ireland afforded few opportunities to present any part of the country for 'complicated crime'.[47] This is a view shared by journalist Fintan O'Toole, who attributes the dearth of 'great crime fiction' until recently to the absence of large-scale cities and their attaching anonymity. Since 'unknown or unknowable faces' create the material for that genre, this made mystery more difficult in an underdeveloped Ireland.[48] Chesterton took a similar view, seeing crime fiction as 'inextricable from, and actively concerned with city life', deriving energy from the 'random collisions of people' and the numerous interactions that city life allows. Liam O'Flaherty, sometimes seen as the 'father of the Irish psychological thriller', also chose a shockingly squalid and desolate Dublin as the backdrop for his crime.[49] However, Dillon chose to avoid portrayals of mean streets and the anonymity that they provide and, although not an admirer of Christie, recalls her village and intimate house settings by placing her crimes within rural Ireland and in the atmosphere of the Big House. In a mirror image of the island settings in Dillon's children's books, her adult characters are, like her teenage heroes, removed to a remote insular location where certain rules of behaviour apply.

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[44] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 3 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors.html.

[45] Brinsley MacNamara, Radio Review, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, Sept. 1954, in Dillon, 33338.

[46] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 3 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors.html.

[47] MacNamara, 1954.

[48] Fintan O'Toole, "Culture Shock: From Chandler and the Playboy to the Contemporary Crime Wave," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 21 Nov. 2009.

[49] Ruth Dudley Edwards, "The Informer: The Life and Art of Liam O'Flaherty," in Burke, *Green Streets* 60.

In each of the three novels, Dillon employs a device whereby, due to circumstance, her characters are drawn from their modern and ordinary lives into the atmosphere of a different world within closely-knit communities. George Arrow, through illness, finds himself ensconced in the stifling air of the old-style nursing home at Crane's Court; Miles de Cogan unexpectedly inherits the eighteenth-century mansion at Dangan; and Professor Daly returns from the outside world to the musty, old-fashioned university, King's College. As in Dillon's children's books, nature and the rural landscape feature strongly as a backdrop to the chosen settings. The Galway hinterland is ever present in *Death at Crane's Court* with George finding it 'so seductive' that it made one wish 'forthwith to pack one's bags and take the next train to the West'.[50] The location is painted in Dillon's trademark, romantic terms with the character immediately awestruck by 'the most beautiful scenery in the world'.[51] Even *Death in the Quadrangle*, while set in Dublin City, is removed from the truly urban to the rural-like surroundings of the Phoenix Park, with its swathes of grassland and grazing deer herds, where 'the city could have been a hundred miles away'.[52]

By placing her stories in traditional institutions, the author is able to incorporate into them an eclectic mix of characters, many of whom are living in an old-world time warp, cushioned from outside influences and stifled by their faded surroundings and genteel companions. Grand houses have, in the past, provided an ideal backdrop for crime fiction with their communities comprised of aristocratic owners, family members, servants, cooks, gardeners, as well as the local doctor or lawyer, allowing for a cast of colourful characters, all of whom, for spite, rejection or greed, have motives for murder. In *Death in the Quadrangle,* a similarly confined community is used to good effect within the 'infallible charm of the academic universe where richly eccentric characters of remarkable conversational powers carry on their quaint routine in circumstances of ordinary cosiness'.[53] Nigel Fitzgerald notes that, while 'death-dealing dons are almost a commonplace of English detective fiction' with real and imagined British universities 'running red with the blood of the learned',[54] Irish colleges had, until Dillon's novel, remained immune from this treatment.[55]

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[50] *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 3 May 1953.
[51] Dillon, *Crane* 5.
[52] Dillon, *Quadrangle* 35.

In creating this precedent with her fictional Dublin academic setting, Dillon is praised for her ability to create 'an Irish university murder story which is richly and entertainingly layered with the jealousies, the spites and the eccentricities of common room life'.[56] She presents the university staff unflatteringly, as living 'at one remove from life' and knowing 'too much about everything'.[57] Her depiction of university manners may have been too authentic for some, as it drew negative comment from academics in Cork, and indeed in other universities. Knowing that Dillon, as the wife of a professor, was acquainted with the idiosyncrasies of academic life, they imagined themselves to be role models for her main protagonists. Dillon records that, on the publication of *Death in the Quadrangle,* she lost friends at a time when she already felt alienated from the Cork matrons and the small, closed world that she felt they represented. Later, when describing her life in that city, she commented on the paranoia that existed there and that, 'underlying their apparent confidence, the people of Cork were nervous of being observed' and had 'a nasty feeling that they were being watched by unfriendly eyes'.[58]

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[53] *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 4 May 1956.

[54] Nigel Fitzgerald, Book Reviews, 14 May 1956. Original typed document in Press Folder, Dillon, 33338.

[55] *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 4 May 1956.

[56] W. "Masters of Murder," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 23 Mar. 1956.

[57] Dillon, *Quadrangle* 149; 95.

[58] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 5.

A Question of Class

The reader of these crime novels is, like the characters, drawn into situations where croquet lawns, servants, afternoon teas and formal dining are the norm. Detailed descriptions of these grand locations abound. The world introduced is one of long driveways and tree bordered lawns,[59] limestone edifices with heavy oak doors,[60] elegant drawing rooms with leather chairs and leather-topped tables,[61] Persian carpets, Hepplewhite furniture, aged walnut grand pianos and monogrammed towels.[62] Dillon repeatedly uses the Big House libraries and their collections of books as a reflection on the nature of their owners, with deference expected from the reader for those whose books were well chosen and a sneer directed at those whose only reading was the *Field* magazine.[63] She also uses the details of Victorian living as recounted to her by her mother[64] and from her own memories of her childhood home in Dangan House, County Galway.[65]

Ó Cuilleanáin explains that she not only knew the romance and grandeur of life in a big house but also 'the nuts and bolts of running one'.[66] As a young married woman, Eilís ran the forty-roomed Cork University Honan Hostel in a manner redolent of the Big House, recalling her grandmother's training in the proper conduct for the 'lady of the house' and what she might do to 'hold the attention and respect of the servants'. She remembers that her mother, Geraldine, on visiting Dillon and her family at the hostel, commented that they 'were living the kind of delightful life that she had had in her youth, and which she thought was departed from the face of the earth'.[67] Dillon herself, commenting on the end of an era when the President no longer lived on the college campus, noted that 'the days of gracious living – and of cheap and plentiful domestic service [...] were well and truly over', with the College 'losing something that had given it character and style'.[68] Dillon, familiar with stories of what this life originally entailed, replicated it in her own life to an extent and drew substantially from her mother's accounts for her novels. The authenticity of her description is recognised by reviewer Edith Shackleton, who admires the fact that Dillon allows 'an Irish Big House, for once in fiction, to be correctly run'.[69]

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[59] Dillon, *Crane* 58.
[60] Dillon, *Send* 24.
[61] Dillon, *Crane* 75.
[62] Dillon, *Send* 24–5.
[63] A magazine about field sports and country life.
[64] Dillon, *Victorian Dublin*, ed. Tom Kennedy assisted by Peter Fox (Dublin: Albertine Kennedy Publishing with the Dublin Arts Festival, 1980).
[65] Dillon, *Inside* 80.
[66] Dillon, Writing http://homepage.eircom.net/~writing/.
[67] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 24; 25.

Ó Cuilleanáin provides greater insight, stating that 'behind the ample prose and comforting imagery lie some painful episodes from her childhood'.[70] He suggests that Dillon's distressing experiences as a housemaid in Dublin hotels provided her with models for the 'sleazy hotel proprietor', for 'the mad hotel guests and for the anxious intrigues of the hotel staff', in *Death at Crane's Court* – evidence that Dillon used what she called her 'grisly' housemaid experiences to good effect.[71] He believes that she may also have partly based the novel on The Hydro Hotel in County Cork which, like its fictional counterpart, 'was full of old people'. Similarly, in the novel *Sent to his Account*, Dillon draws on her particular childhood sadness at the loss of Dangan House, which she described in her children's book *Down in the World* and in *Inside Ireland.* Not only does she use the name Dangan for her fictional house, she also deals with the issue of inheritance, a topic that continued to trouble her greatly, since she had been excluded from some family bequests.[72]

Dillon's principal characters, like their creator, are very comfortable in this old-world milieu and the author presents them as being superior in class, appearance and manner. In *Death at Crane's Court*, we meet Mr Quinn, 'thin and fox-faced, dressed in jodhpurs'; the opinionated, retired British army officer, Major Dunlea; Mrs Fennell, whose 'voice was the soft, carefully-taught lady's voice of fifty years ago'; and Horace, who speaks with a gentrified and archaic tone, 'a husky voice stiff with culture'.[73] The inequitable relationship between the landlord class and the tenant-labourer is described as being 'real feudal style' in its divisions, and there is a recognition of its inevitability since ''tis hard to get over the breeding'.[74] Class division is emphasised by the characters that inadvertently tumble into what Dillon acknowledges as an older world. The character Miles de Cogan, in *Death at Crane's Court*, 'had not realized that people still lived in such style, and the feeling of discomfort that he felt could almost be called embarrassment – as if he had blundered on the stage in the middle of a play about gentlemen of leisure'.[75] Equally, Garda Pat Henley, in *Sent to his Account*, is surprised 'that there were still people in Ireland who could afford to live in such old-fashioned style' and he enjoys the 'delightful mixture of landed gentleman and honourable business man' among the company.[76]

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[68] John A. Murphy, *The College, A History of Queens/University College Cork 1945–1995* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995) 333.
[69] Edith Shackleton, *The Lady* [London] 5 Aug. 1954.
[70] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors.htm.
[71] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 24.
[72] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors.htm.
[73] Dillon, *Crane* 41; 44; 136.

Some of these outsiders have to learn the ways of the gentry and Dillon humorously describes their fumbled attempts to adopt their accepted dress code and manners. Mr Burden, who, being 'mad anxious to be a real gentleman', mistakenly wears expensive clothing, unaware that 'a worn out old tweed suit was the thing for a gentleman'.[77] However, the aristocratic de Cogan, whose name was 'bolstered up with a preposition', being a recipient of his due inheritance, remembers not to say 'thank you' too often. Implying that the gentry were victims of their situation, he explains: 'I had been brought up to be a gentleman and I was really fit for nothing else'. He is encouraged to conform to tradition and to get involved in 'a little shooting or hunting or fishing' – the fitting pastimes for a man of his class and situation.[78]

While Dillon demonstrates that this class-conscious lifestyle is an anachronism for most people in 1950s Ireland, she clearly appears to be at home with the vestiges of this upper-class world as she presents it. George articulates the rediscovered sense of comfort in arriving at the nursing home: 'There was protection here, the same feeling of security and order that he had not had since he had left the nursery'.[79] This seems to be an autobiographical echo of Dillon's need to withdraw to a secure time in her childhood when she had been soothed by the nursemaid and had been kept safe from harm.[80]

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[74] Dillon, *Sent* 65.
[75] Dillon, *Crane* 26.
[76] Dillon, *Sent* 94.
[77] Dillon, *Crane* 71.
[78] Dillon, *Sent* 56; 59; 57; 201.

More Character than Crime

In reviewing *Death at Crane's Court*, critics describe it as 'not so much a mystery story as a collection of characters rarely met within this type of fiction',[81] and as 'a novel of character first and a detective story second'.[82] They compliment Dillon for 'her powers in etching character',[83] 'her sharp eye for the oddities of human behaviour' and 'astringently entertaining' dialogue[84] but criticise her for the fact that 'her principal characters are a little too unusual' and 'tend to destroy a feeling of realism'.[85] This lack of realism is compounded by Dillon's adoption of an intended comic approach and an enduring habit of comparing her characters to animals. This device, based on her memory of a childhood parlour game, is a contrivance used in her children's novels that extends into much of her adult work.[86] In a reversal of her anthropomorphic phase in children's literature, described earlier, Dillon introduces the postmistress 'who glared through the bars like a black leopard'; the old lady in bed with the eyes and teeth of a wolf; the man with the teeth and hair of a red squirrel and 'brown beady eyes full of squirrelly surprise'[87]; Major Dunlea with the 'long wandering snout and dark-rimmed eyes of a badger'[88]; and Tom Reid with 'the fat selfish brain like a summer slug under a stone'.[89] The technique is taken to extremes in *Death in the Quadrangle*, when Professor Badger's home is referred to as 'a sett' and he admits to being of 'a nocturnal nature'.[90] Dillon, mimicking James Stephens' novel *The Crock of Gold,* which she greatly admired, allows some of these characters, notably Professor Daly, to expound quite wittily on various aspects of life and literature.[91] While generally successful, there is a tendency towards the didactic in these diatribes and an overlap with Dillon's own views on these subjects.

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[79] Dillon, *Crane* 12.
[80] Dillon, *Inside* 76.
[81] Leslie Forse, "Gory but Nice," *Morning Advertiser* [London] 10 Feb. 1953.
[82] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Sept. 1954.
[83] *Irish Press* [Dublin] 10 Feb. 1953.
[84] *Irish Times* [Dublin] 21 Mar. 1953.
[85] Force, "Gory but Nice".
[86] Dillon, *Geese* 83.
[87] Dillon, *Sent* 161; 171; 82.
[88] Dillon, *Crane* 100.
[89] Dillon, *Sent* 35.

It is also notable that Dillon omits a significant female presence in these novels, with women featuring only in the background of the drama as quirky, elderly ladies, as brief love interests or as incitement to murder. Women are portrayed as either subservient or ruthless, and when they are occasionally cast as romantic figures, are stereotypical and unrealistic. For example, in *Death at Crane's Court,* the character Barbara Murray is described as 'a picture of man's classic ideal of woman at her most attractive', 'beautiful, tall, athletic' and 'calm and full of repose' with 'quiet intelligent eyes'.[92] Similarly, in *Death in the Quadrangle,* Miss O'Leary is described in a manner more fitting to popular romantic fiction, as one of the most beautiful women the Professor had ever seen, not only 'quite tall and very slender, with jet-black hair and searching dark blue eyes' but also 'a ravening wolf'.[93] Echoing some of her real-life difficulties in what became a recurring observation, Dillon writes disparagingly of female assertiveness, stating that 'women are more ruthless than men' and that there is nothing worse than when women fall out with each other.[94] At the same time, she comments on the dismissive attitude towards women in a male-dominated world, on the limited occupations available to them and on a status that is dependent on their home-making capabilities. She depicts women as subservient to powerful male figures who see them as appendages 'to complete the picture of the house',[95] or for their 'usefulness only'.[96] With this admitted awareness, it is regrettable that Dillon failed to grasp the opportunity to counter this stereotype by including, as LT Meade had done in 1903 in *The Sorceress and the Strand,* powerful, resourceful, determined female characters in leading roles in these crime novels, a feature that might have provided greater contemporary relevance.[97]

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[90] Dillon, *Quadrangle* 77.
[91] Dillon, 33330, "The Novels of James Stephens".
[92] Dillon, *Crane* 82–3.
[93] Dillon, *Quadrangle* 16.
[94] Dillon, *Crane* 187; 147.
[95] Dillon, *Send* 119; 41.
[96] Dillon, *Quadrangle* 23.

Some Recurring Themes

Ó Cuilleanáin contends that despite Dillon's nationalist background, 'there is little sense of personal, family or national trauma' in his mother's three detective books. In fact, there are a number of allusions to, and reminders of, historical events within these stories. In a replication of the didactic approach of her children's books and with a continued absorption with the past, Dillon reverts to her tendency to educate her audience about Ireland's colonial struggles and the sense of injustice that remained in the Irish psyche as a result of British rule. Noel Debeer identifies this as a strategy used by novelists such as Walter Macken and Francis McManus who, 'by probing an ancient wound', seek to recover a sense of national identity by uniting the people against the common enemy.[98]

Dillon contrives to include one such incident in *Death at Crane's Court* when the character George is urged to visit the old local jail, allowing a factual incident dating from 1882 to be related.[99] In a direct reference to the Maamtrasna murders, characters recall the unjust sentencing and hanging of a young Irish-speaking Connemara man for murders that he claimed he did not commit,[100] allegedly because he was tried and condemned in English – a language he neither spoke nor understood.[101] Since these books are set only thirty years after Irish independence, Dillon's characters vividly recall other related significant events. Referring almost nostalgically to the presence of the Black and Tans, James in *Sent to his Account*, states: 'There was blood spilled in Dangan before [...] and maybe there will be again'. He recounts that although he had been only eight years old at that time, he had heard stories of brave exploits and had been 'heart sorry it was all over' before he was old enough to take part. The narrator explains how old rivalries remained ingrained in the Irish memory many years after the original events. Even the language used is reminiscent of more troubled times, with claims made that the person responsible for the murder in the story must be 'a liar, an informer and a Castle hack'. These were all derogatory terms that were directed towards those Irish individuals who sided with the British administration and that had stemmed from the bitter divide in the early part of the twentieth century.[102] De Cogan, new to this lifestyle, is warned to 'conform to the traditions' expected of the lord of the manor and to find company among people of his own kind.[103]

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[97] Cheryl Blake Price, "Imagined Criminalities: The New Woman and Crime," *Nineteenth-Century Genders Studies* 6.3 (Winter 2010) 4 Feb. 2011 http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue63/price.htm.
[98] Noel Debeer, "The Irish Novel Looks Backward," *The Irish Novel In Our Time*, eds. Patrick Rafroidi, & Maurice Harmon (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1975–6) 106.
[99] Dillon, *Crane* 179.
[100] The Maamtrasna murders – the murder of the Joyce family – took place on 17 August 1882. This event is also referred to by Dillon in *Inside* 57–8.
[101] Dillon, *Crane* 179.

Dillon also reminds the reader that the sense of inequity arising from land disputes and evictions are still to the fore. In *Sent to His Account*, the character Henley remarks on the 'old fashioned feudal atmosphere' of mutual distrust that remains in Dangan, with its 'sporting gentry and watchful natives'. Dillon gives details of the age-old tactics used to maintain ownership, the hatred that ensued and the bitterness that remained in local memory for generations. In the same book, the character Germaine also explains: 'Private grievances will be remembered, and it will all be ugly and lopsided, and very different from the pure-souled agitation against a corrupting influence that it was in the beginning'. Dillon again creates an opportunity to reflect her family's views of the Irish Civil War as 'the most regrettable and divisive event in Irish history', an opinion regularly expressed in her later historical books. In another undisguised family reference, she mentions the opposition towards the agrarian reforms of Sir Horace Plunkett and the view held by some landlords that he was 'a damned radical'. As with her children's fiction, Dillon continues to endorse the Irish language, culture and people and describes the clear childhood memory of the 'remote, dignified courtesy' and the 'soft-voiced Connemara men shouting from one to the other in Irish'.[104] There is, as always, an innate superiority attached to these people, personified in the detective Mike Kenny, in *Death at Crane's Court*, a 'Galway man born and bred', with a 'deep understanding of his people' that had led to his success in crime solving.[105]

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[102] Dillon, *Sent* 91; 91; 102.
[103] Dillon, *Sent* 201.
[104] Dillon, *Sent* 128; 62; 65; 64.

Assessment of the Crime Novels

Dillon's work belongs within a type of crime writing described as 'cosy' and summarised by Campbell Ross as the kind in which 'authors play with their readers as the great detective plays with the suspects until he gathers them together to expose the guilty and restore order to a society only temporarily disrupted by crime'. Her work belongs to the 'puzzle' as opposed to the more 'hard-boiled' version that gained popularity through Dashiel Hammett and Raymond Chandler.[106] Dillon's treatment of plot was justly criticised as 'not strong if judged by accepted standards',[107] 'a little over dependent on coincidence'[108] and 'far too involved to be convincing'.[109] The reviews legitimately recognise her stories as tame and rather bland, 'pleasant and gently-written',[110] as opposed to 'the block-busting type of detective story'[111], and convey the reality that these stories fall far short of hard-edged crime writing. However, Dillon did not claim any aspiration to produce such work, finding in the 'chatty Irish whodunit'[112] a better means of drawing on her own experiences of Big House living. The description of one novel as 'no masterpiece but more entertaining than average',[113] with 'leisurely pace and a proper use of the English language' is an accurate one and can be applied to the three books.[114] Ó Cuilleanáin accepts that Dillon's detective stories from the 1950s are 'very much of their time, not only in their subject matter but also in the sardonic style, the light touch, the slightly satirical stance'.[115] Yet it would be more correct to say that Dillon's novels belong to an even earlier time, and while attempting contemporary crime stories, the author largely ignored the outside world, by reverting to the insular but, nonetheless, interesting background, and the outmoded atmosphere of an earlier generation and a disappearing way of life.

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[105] Dillon, *Crane* 69.
[106] in Burke, *Green Streets* 29–30.
[107] Forse, "Gory but Nice".
[108] *Birmingham Post*, 3 Mar. 1953.
[109] "Irish Detective Story," *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 24 Mar. 1956.
[110] FE Pardoe, "Detection," *Birmingham Post*, 1 Dec. 1953.
[111] Norman Blood, *Time and Tide* [London] 9 May 1953.
[112] *The Observer* [London] 15 Feb. 1953.
[113] Maurice Richardson, "Crime Ration," *The Observer* [London] 15 Feb. 1953.
[114] *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 Feb. 1953.
[115] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors.htm.

If current crime fiction has, as O'Toole states, become 'arguably the nearest thing we have to a realist literature adequate to capturing the nature of contemporary society', no such claim can be made for Dillon in her time.[116] Declan Burke praises today's crime writers for their courage in grappling with current issues 'without the safety net of a decade or two in which to ponder the possible ramifications'.[117] He points out that Liam O'Flaherty had paved the way by publishing *The Assassin* in 1928, only a year after the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Justice, on which the book is based. Equally Dillon, with her access to family accounts of politics, intrigue and death, was hugely advantaged with real-life stories as potential material that could have been adapted to a more contemporary setting. However, she did not draw on this resource, being too cautious, inhibited or unwilling to implicate family and friends, and she chose not to be 'timely and provocative',[118] preferring to resort to safer, less controversial settings – with mystery stories that are not too mysterious and crime novels that are not too criminal.

An 'Ephemeral' Genre

Having written three crime novels, Dillon may have concluded, as one critic reminds us, that crime fiction is 'the most ephemeral of all writing, for no one re-reads it'.[119] Although some commentators saw that she had prospects within the crime genre, describing her work as 'promising well for the future'[120] and seeing her as 'a decided acquisition to the ranks of the literate and sophisticated detective novel writers',[121] others disagreed. MacNamara, while commending her efforts, felt that this was not the genre to which Dillon was best suited and urged her to experiment in the broader field of Irish writing:

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[116] Fintan O'Toole, *Culture Shock* "From Chandler and the 'Playboy' to the contemporary crime wave," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 21 Nov. 2009.
[117] Declan Burke, "Criminally undervalued," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 31 Mar. 2010.
[118] Burke, "Criminally undervalued".
[119] FE Pardoe,"Detection," *Birmingham Post*, 1 Dec. 1953.
[120] *Birmingham Post*, 3 Mar. 1953.
[121] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Sept. 1954.

> Her natural gifts as a storyteller are everywhere apparent [...] and seem to call for a larger exercise than the detective story can give. It is to be hoped she will not forget to remember that as a new Irish writer of exceptional promise, the Irish novel in the larger sense may be waiting for a fresh lease of life from her capable hands.[122]

Recognising both the limitations and the ephemeral nature of the genre, Dillon then sought to write adult literature in a form that would endure, would be critically acclaimed at home and abroad, and would be accepted by her peers. Ó Cuilleanáin agrees that his mother's 'sights were set on other things' and that 'a certain creative restlessness, visible at several points in her career, prompted her to move on' to, what he terms, 'ironic literary novels appealing to a sophisticated minority readership'.[123] An *Irish Times* reviewer encouraged her 'to launch into the wider seas of the real novelist' and Dillon, seeking to be seen as a 'real novelist' above all else, was happy to pursue yet another genre.[124] She recalls a satisfaction with her achievement and a desire to progress in her career: 'My apprenticeship lasted a full seven years before I felt fit to face the wonderful world I had set out to conquer'.[125] She was ready, as she saw it, 'to move on to higher things' and away from what had been 'hitherto almost a lady's hobby'.[126] With greater maturity, she believed that she had progressed from the 'terror' of her early days 'into a fully-fledged professional who was prepared to face the awful consequences of embarking on the dangerous life of the writer'. She explains her need to explore other territory: 'It was only then did I feel entitled to begin on what I had always wanted to write – novels of character with a strong story based in Ireland as I knew it'.[127] The problem for Dillon and her audience was that elements of the

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[122] Brinsley Mac Namara, Rev. of *Sent to His Account* by Eilís Dillon, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, Sept. 1954, Radio Transcript, in Dillon, 33338, 54.
[123] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/about.html.
[124] *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 June 1954.
[125] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 10.
[126] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary".
[127] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 10; 11.

Ireland as she knew it, were not altogether familiar to the majority of her middle-class readers.

Contemporary Literary Novels

In the two novels that followed, *The Head of the Family* and *Bold John Henebry,* which share the same subject matter, Dillon continued to draw heavily on her experience and memory of large houses to provide her with the atmosphere, character types, mode of dialogue, style of dress and codes of behaviour, suited to what she regarded as her 'contemporary' literary novels.[128] Dillon referred to the dynamic that pertained within one of her fictional large houses, stating that: 'in the closed-in protected air of that household, neuroses grew fat and overbearing and unmanageable'.[129] In these novels she explores these very neuroses within claustrophobic, insular family settings, with the inhabitants forced to confront a world that is changing around them. While the two books share a similarity of topic and a use of retrospection, they differ in tone and are dealt with separately below. Ó Cuilleanáin points out that Dillon's personal reading was 'largely a function of what she wanted to write' and it provided her with role models at various times in her career. He cites Evelyn Waugh and TS Eliot as particular influences, suggesting that 'high style, dry wit and Christian culture' appealed to her.[130] Others have suggested the influence of the 'brilliantly oppressive novels'[131] of Ivy Compton Burnett (1884–1969),[132] one of which Dillon praised for its depiction of the 'fabric of the family', its witty dialogue and its realistic characters.[133] Dillon found scope to pursue within two family sagas, some of her favourite and recurring themes, among them: snobbery, class difference, the influence of previous generations, the problems of living under the shadow of greatness, and the relationship between the young and the old.

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[128] Dillon, *The Head of The Family* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960) (1st ed.) This ed. (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1982); Dillon, *Bold John Henebry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965).
[129] Dillon, *Bitter* 197.
[130] Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009. http://www.ruemorguepress.com/about.html
[131] John Jordan, Rev. of *The Head of the Family* by Eilís Dillon, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, 9 May 1960, Radio.
[132] *Men and Wives* (1931); *A House and its Head* (1935); *The Present and the Past* (1953).
[133] Dillon, "Family Feeling," Rev. of *A Father and his Fate*, by Ivy Compton Burnett, *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 16 Aug. 1957.

The Head of the Family (1960)

The eponymous head of the family is the elderly Roger Mallon, 'one of the giants of Anglo-Irish literature',[134] and 'unwitting' founder of 'Meticulism', a fictional literary movement which, as the name suggests, is based on meticulous attention to detail and which, despite its cult following, 'no one but the founder was able to make work'.[135] Dillon captures Mallon's vanity by presenting him basking in the glory of the adulation he continues to attract, despite not having been published for over forty years.[136] She also highlights the tenacity of academics, as they insist on reading meanings and messages in Mallon's work that Roger himself was sure he had never intended but which had 'turned out to be extraordinarily penetrating and clever'.[137] There are many comparisons to Joyce's life and work for example, Roger's significant first encounter in June 1905 with Flora his future wife was a meeting that provided him with the impetus to write, as well as years of inspiration.

The book focuses on Mallon's arrogance and its ruinous effect on the members of his household, who all suffer from being under the cloud of his alleged genius. Through his sermons on life's vicissitudes, Dillon creates a platform for her own views on a variety of topics, including research, the egotism of the writer, criticism, education and sexual mores. Her disdain for critics, regularly expressed in her lecture notes, are communicated through Mallon's disparaging remark, that 'every critic is a backstairs literary man'. Similarly, her noted opinions on the wider possibilities of self-education are expressed through Louis' quip to his son, 'you are not in the College to get a liberal education, you're there to get a degree'.[138] Dillon also celebrates her own interests, in particular, her devotion to music, to 'clean, unhurried, Bach: calm sophisticated Bach', without whom the character Teresa 'would long, long ago have gone out of her mind'.[139] She was, as previously noted, to return later to a greater commemoration of Bach in her novel for children.

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[134] Dillon, *The Head of the Family* (Dublin: Ward River Press) 1982.
[135] Dillon, 33348, "Plots".
[136] Dillon, *Head* 10.
[137] Dillon, *Head* 29.
[138] Dillon, *Head* 80; 157.

A typically dilapidated remnant of an earlier time, the house itself is on this occasion not in a rural setting but situated in Dublin's wealthy south-city suburbs, the area where Dillon spent much of her life in similar properties belonging to her grandparents. Like its owner, Mallon's house, a downsized, urban version of the Big House, is past its best. It reflects the decayed nature of the relationships within, as well as the deterioration of a privileged lifestyle, while outside, the world is adapting to a more middle-class way of life. The friction between the old order and the new is set against this air of decline. Dublin society has changed, with young people living a more liberal life that is alien to their parents. New modes of behaviour are coming into vogue and 'innocence is thoroughly out of fashion', leading to a lack of mutual understanding and to inevitable conflict.[140] At the heart of the story are the antagonistic relationships between fathers and sons, and the communication problems within that dynamic. With great insight, Dillon identifies the difficulties, made worse by one father's 'little barbs which made affection impossible' and which are compounded in the son 'wrestling with his duty to love his father'.[141] Dillon, as demonstrated in her work for children, was comfortable with this theme of disparity between youth and age and, conversely, with their occasional successful alignments. Although only forty years of age at the time of writing this book, she shows a remarkable capacity for getting into the cantankerous but erudite mind of older men, a feature that can perhaps be explained by her contact with, and observation of, older academics throughout her life. She also recognised, and was part of, numerous intergenerational interactions within her own family in large houses and, as her son states: 'she was aware of the ambiguities and destructive tensions that can occur in a household'.[142] Parallels are evident between the Mallon home and the Victorian household where Dillon's mother grew up and in which her grandmother effected her belief, as do the elders in this fictional house, that 'young people should be given as little as possible'. Revealingly, one of the fathers in discussion with his son states: 'I find the present much more fatiguing than the past'.[143] Dillon, as a writer, never suffers this fatigue with her family past but embraces the old-world environment, creating an air of faded gentility, among former members of the upper classes as they reluctantly come to terms with the challenges of a newly educated middle-class population in Ireland.

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[139] Dillon, *Head* 99.
[140] Dillon, *Head* 213.
[141] Dillon, *Head* 14; 89.
[142] Ó Cuilleanáin, 7 Dec. 2009 http://www.ruemorguepress.com/about.html.

In *The Head of the Family*, Dillon engages in a witty, ironic style of writing, apparently revelling in the challenge of writing a novel with a literary quality, which is itself about literature. She adopts a self-consciously upper-crust delivery, mimicking the tone described as an Anglo-Irish style of 'academic humour' with 'graceful wit', articulated with a beautiful speaking voice.[144] The author's use of philosophical maxims is entertaining and her mannered opinion pieces, derived from this style of writing, are delivered with particular humour and versatility. There is also a mischievous sparkle to some of her descriptions, as well as a skill for keen observation. Depictions of the opinionated Flora 'as the enemy of continuous thought' and of the affected college students as having 'practised a long lounging gait and a tired manner', evoke the personalities of her characters and a directionless way of life.[145] Dillon's witticisms are memorable and clever, for example, when she describes hypochondria stating: 'the headache is man's greatest invention' and explains mood by saying: 'Lots of people are bitter before breakfast. Afterwards they get strength to face the day'. In a reference to progress, deemed unnecessary in this household which is a relic of old ways, she writes: 'Man is kept in bondage by his domestic appliances'. Dillon is also perceptive in her descriptions of manners, affectation and dress, and manages to inject a nicely ironic tone to them. In detailing the clothes of the dowdy Frances, the author refers to her 'baggy, County, home-made jobs that you couldn't get away with unless you had canoed up the Amazon, or had some smashing intellectual achievement to do you instead of elegance'.[146] However, the ambience of the house is at odds with the younger members of the fictional family who, although ostensibly living in a privileged environment, are actually impoverished and must embrace the realities of life in Dublin with very little money. Since they had been reared 'like a decadent aristocracy' they had not bargained that one day they would have to earn their living.[147] They too have become accustomed to a life that is no longer feasible and have difficulty finding direction in a household that holds firm to the old ways and traditions, and maintains a great front of respectability. This front also hides displays of emotion in a family in which love was 'a term that could only be used academically' and in which honest affection had 'to have a sting in its tail' for fear of showing kindness.[148] While most of the action takes place behind the closed doors of the house, there are occasional glimpses of another more contemporary urban life, largely ignored by the elder Mallons.

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[143] Dillon, *Head* 13.
[144] De Vere White, *The Anglo-Irish* 23.
[145] Dillon, *Head* 29; 83.

In focusing on Roger Mallon, Dillon provides herself with the perfect vehicle to explore the issues about writing that exercised her mind and dominated her approach. She derides the reverential stance of Mallon's avid disciples who, like those of Joyce, examine every aspect of his literary output, explaining: 'Still they laboured on, analysing and labelling, but never of course, duplicating the elusive genius'.[149] Dillon sees the value of such a following in at least providing the writer with the adulation he craves, 'a pleasure not usually given to novelists' and, through Mallon, comments that 'a good dramatist can sit in the back row of the theatre and watch his words squeeze the tears out of a fascinated audience'.[150] A similar need for direct affirmation may have prompted Dillon to try her hand at playwriting from time to time. She also recognises, or perhaps envies, in Mallon the egotism of great writers, the colossal 'arrogance, the assurance' of his own powers as a writer, which are in sharp contrast to her own insecurities outlined in this study.[151] His children and grandchildren, struggling with life in the shadow of greatness, mirror Dillon's consciousness of living up to talented forebears, not just in literary endeavour but also in many other fields of life. Dillon's views on the tenacious nature of creativity, described by her in an essay on Baron Corvo[152] are expressed through the character Mark, a young admirer of Mallon and a family friend:

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[146] Dillon, *Head* 59; 101; 54; 108; 98.
[147] Dillon, *Head* 101.
[148] Dillon, *Head* 208; 141.
[149] Dillon, *Head* 10.
[150] Dillon, *Head* 73.
[151] Dillon, *Head* 53.

> He would not believe that the creative force could ever die a natural death, though it might perhaps be strangled. If it were forced down in one form it would soon manifest itself in another, like a neurotic disease, which successively produces varying symptoms.[153]

The invasiveness of this 'disease' is one of the things that motivated Dillon to engage in a lifetime of writing, even when she struggled to attain mastery of various genres. At one point in the novel, she reveals her own wrestling with contemporary writing, describing the character, John, as 'reading novels of a new kind' that are 'about rather dreary people whose only claim to be interesting was that their sex-life ran backwards instead of forwards'.[154] While this is an interesting and wry observation, it is in keeping with Dillon's avoidance of issues of sexuality in these early books and her noted criticism of those who did address them, as well as her hope that she would confront them in future writing. The reviewer in *The Catholic Herald*, unsurprisingly given the conservative nature of such a paper, recognises Dillon's uniqueness in this and greets this omission positively: 'What a relief it is to have a novel in which the sins of the flesh are simply stated instead of being elaborated upon, detail by boring detail'.[155] On the one hand, Dillon's choice of subject matter was dominated by fear of criticism if she were to write daringly, while, on the other, she may not have welcomed as ideal this endorsement of her conservatism.

Dillon, in her outline for the novel, sees the main theme as 'loneliness and man's attempts to overcome it' viewed through the mind of Mallon, a literary success, but at the same time, 'a psychological invalid'.[156] The completed novel acts as a moral tale with Mallon's belated realisation that the detachment he preached was 'bull and balderdash', and with his final comprehension of what 'the common, ordinary people' had always known, that 'to love and be loved are the important things'.[157]

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[152] Dillon, 33334, "Frederick Baron Corvo".
[153] Dillon, *Head* 171.
[154] Dillon, *Head* 193.
[155] R.A.N. "The Silent Irish," *Catholic Herald* [London] 14 Apr. 1960.

With *The Head of the Family,* Dillon achieved recognition as a writer of artistic merit to the extent that an *Irish Times* reviewer regarded her 'as well on the way to becoming one of our more accomplished authors'. He also commended the novel for 'the unquestionable power behind its delicacy of construction, a sense of character and its implications that carries through what could have been an unwieldy story in an undeniably impressive manner'.[158] Another critic found that, in her eagerness, Dillon had overworked the writing. In his words, 'one is left with the impression that the novel fails to glow with life because it is too elaborate, albeit superior to the ordinary run of slapdash slices of life', leaving the reader 'both exhausted and perplexed'.[159] Although it is true that the descriptions are sometimes overworked, the book has an incisive quality and is a successful examination of the demise of an older way of life and the emergence of Ireland's middle classes. Dillon's skill as a novelist is evident in *The Head of the Family,* with her well-observed portraits of a variety of characters and in her brief, but too few, vignettes of Dublin life – all presented in a developing style that appears effortless and had possibility for widespread appeal. However, in her next novel, another study of the life of the head of a family, while continuing to explain the disparity between old and new modes of behaviour, Dillon amends her narrative style in what appears to be a preparation for her later work.

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[156] Dillon, 33348, "Plots".
[157] Dillon, *Head* 215.
[158] RM Gamble, "A sympathetic Irish novel," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 26 Apr. 1960.
[159] *The Scotsman* [Edinburgh] 19 Mar. 1960.

Bold John Henebry (1965)

Choosing another patriarch, on this occasion, patriot, folk hero and successful businessman, in *Bold John Henebry,* Dillon revisits the theme of family dynamics.[160] However, the focus on the protagonist's past and the historical events that shaped him, places Dillon on the cusp of a change in direction towards the historical novels that were to come. In a twist on the Big House novel, Dillon creates a character who, unlike the Anglo-Irish who inherited their large properties, comes from humble beginnings and manages to rise in fortune through hard work and eventually become the owner of the Big House of his home locality. Henebry, despite his increasing wealth, maintains an affinity with his roots, never losing the values instilled in his early life, which, unfortunately, he fails to transmit to his family. The novel examines the changing face of Ireland in the 1940s and 50s, with its developing materialism, and compares it to an earlier age when old-style values were appreciated.

In John Henebry, Dillon, reflecting traditional Irish storytelling, creates a hero of almost mythological proportions. With hyperbole usually reserved for the legendary Cú Chulainn, we learn of his deeds, not only as a champion hurler but also as a person who 'could lift a sleeping fish out of the river', 'could render a snipe unconscious with a stone from a sling at twenty yards', and 'sing patriotic songs and play fiddle and concertina'.[161] Henebry's greatness, in resisting the local landlord in Goresbridge, his native town, is fittingly celebrated in a ballad dedicated to him. In time, mimicking the country's rise in fortune, Henebry gains respectability, all the while retaining his affiliation to his rural and, by implication, purer and more natural beginnings. In preparation for her later novels, Dillon experiments with historical background, emphasising Henebry's nationalist heritage, with references to previous generations of his family, to the Land War, the Fenians and to the development of revolutionary nationalism. Although he does not take part in the 1916 Rising, Henebry feels cowardly for not doing so, recognising that self-analysis has blinded him to his convictions, and that his new-found sophisticated way of life has bred caution, 'the enemy of decisive action'.[162] His new lifestyle has distanced him from his own people, since with his good clothes, smooth clean, hands and changed accent, there was no possibility of easy communication with them – demonstrating a gulf that is further explored by Dillon in her later historical novels.[163] In a re-visitatation of the notion of idealised rural communities previously displayed in her work for children, Dillon, in *Bold John Henebry* portrays the people of northwest Cork and Mayo as being of admirable character, maintaining 'innocence and childlike goodness', despite difficulties of agrarian strife, antagonism between landlord and tenant, and the twin evils of tuberculosis and emigration.[164] They 'are celebrated for their independent spirit and for their speed and efficiency in exacting vengeance', the men being 'tough and clever and resourceful', the women 'shrewd and thrifty and hardworking'.[165]

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[160] Dillon, *Bold John Henebry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965).
[161] Dillon, *Bold* 8.

The locals mark occasions with ballads in Irish, 'of famine and emigration, young wives drowning, young husbands murdered for their money, young girls raped by wicked squires and dying of shame and sorrow unavenged'.[166] The importance attributed by Dillon to the ballad in this novel and in those that followed is an indication of the part it played in her own upbringing when she learned from the large 'gentle' repertoire of her mother, and 'the more 'bloodthirsty and vindictive' selection of Charlotte, her childhood nurse.[167] It is also a direct appreciation of its significant place in Irish nationalist tradition. Ballads, with their ability to help people to remember the past and to recognise in them the events of the present, had become particularly pertinent in commemorating the centenary of the 1798 Rising, allowing it to thrive in the popular imagination. The ballad was famously viewed by the nationalist politician and writer Thomas Davis (1814–45), as having the ability 'to raise and soften and strengthen and enlarge us with the passion of our great history',[168] and thereby essential to the education of future generations of Irish people. Subsequently, Lady Gregory, along with other Revivalists, had viewed the ballad as 'the appropriate vehicle for stimulating the public memory' and to honour the 'felons' or 'the men who loved the cause that never dies'.[169] As Leigh Tillman Partington points out, ballads, as a genre, fitted Gregory's 'great man' theory of history, as 'they celebrate both the heroes, the men of action, and the poets, the men of words, in a continuous line from the ancients to the present, all links in the chain of tragic joy that is Irish history'.[170] This also aligned with Dillon's belief that the ballad constituted a powerful treasury of memory and her view that 'as long as there are ballads and song-makers and the long memory of the people' Irish culture can remain intact.[171]

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[162] Dillon, *Bold* 32.
[163] Dillon, *Bold* 49.
[164] Dillon, *Bold* 50.
[165] Dillon, *Bold* 7.
[166] Dillon, *Bold 9.*
[167] Dillon, *Inside* 80.

Dillon makes further use of family experience in *Bold John Henebry*. In a replication of her great grandfather's career as a property developer in Dublin, as narrated to her by her mother, Dillon describes Henebry's success in trade and his rise in fortune, as well as his ownership of houses in Donnybrook. As the story progresses chronologically, she also relies on family stories of participation in the nationalist movement, with references to drilling with the Volunteers; the 1916 Rising; the sheltering of Michael Collins in a shop in St Stephen's Green; and tension in the household following the Civil War. All of these strike a familiar note as they echo actual experiences of the Plunkett and Dillon households, including Dillon's own childhood memory, which is replayed in the Black and Tan raid on Henebry's home and the fear that resulted from it. In a hint of what was to come in her later novels, Dillon's moralising intrudes upon the narrative. In particular, in describing the spirit of revolution, the resolve and conscience of those involved and their almost saintly qualities, Dillon explains that the 'memory of their own sufferings gave them too much sympathy with their enemies', often allowing spies to go unpunished 'out of charity' for them.[172] With the didactic intent familiar from her children's novels and with recall of family participation, she further asserts through her characters her own view of 1916, stating that 'revolutions blight everyone who takes a hand in them', and thereby constitute a warning that armed resistance should not be undertaken lightly or with any idea of personal gain. She excuses the revolutionaries of 1916 who had expected to die but had 'considered it necessary and worthwhile all the same'.[173] With the benefit of hindsight and the knowledge of Ireland's later development in the 1960s, Dillon reassures the reader about change and the essential development of confidence: 'You won't see the change for a long time. Perhaps you won't see it at all in your time. A beginning has to be made somewhere. The next generation will have to carry on with it. The people have to learn to be confident.'[174]

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[168] Thomas Osborne Davis, "The Ballad History of Ireland," (1st published) *The Nation*, 30 Nov. 1844, This ed. published by CELT, an online project of University College Cork, 2008, 10 July 2011 http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E800002-022/index.html.

[169] Lady Augusta Gregory, *Poets and Dreamers: The Works of Lady Gregory*, eds. TR Henn & Colin Smythe (New York: Oxford Univerity Press, 1974) 257–8.

[170] Leigh Tillman Partington, "Roughly Hammered Links: Lady Gregory, Irish Ballads and Political Memory," *The South Carolina Review*, Clemson University Digital Press, 32.1 (Fall 1999) 150, 17 July 2011 http://www.clemson.edu/cedp/cudp/scr/volumes/scr_32-1.htm.

[171] Dillon, 33346, "Folk Memory as History" 40.

Once again, echoing Sir Horace Plunkett's words and his urge for Irish maturation, Dillon gives predominance to confidence as a major aspiration for the Irish people, and perhaps for herself as a writer.[175] This need for progress and development is a central theme of the novel, with the artist and the entrepreneur playing vital roles. Dillon highlights the pivotal role of the artistic community, asserting that it is artists who 'have the future of the country in their hands', that they are the people 'who make a country' and provide essential encouragement.[176] This idea is given weight by a cameo appearance by WB Yeats, which explains the poet's importance in giving credence to cultural endeavour in Ireland.[177] Reflecting on the changes in Ireland that have occurred within his lifetime, Henebry ponders on the climate of fear in which he had grown up, remembering, in a clear reference to Dillon's idealised, childhood island settings, that any good times were so rare that they 'had been like little islands in a bitter winter sea'.[178] This is contrasted to the modern, easy way of life provided through the hard work of his generation but which had not had the character-building effect he would have desired.

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[172] Dillon, *Bold* 135.
[173] Dillon, *Bold* 84.
[174] Dillon, *Bold* 136.
[175] Plunkett, *New Century* 1904.
[176] Dillon, *Bold* 122.
[177] Dillon, *Bold* 124.
[178] Dillon, *Bold* 111.

At the heart of the novel is Henebry's sense of loneliness as he straddles the two Irelands. While urging the economic rehabilitation of the country, there is the desire to preserve the best of the past. This isolation parallels the difficulties for the Anglo-Irish population who found themselves in post-revolutionary Ireland caught between two worlds. The death of Charlotte, Henebry's wife, signals that decline. Charlotte, intent on keeping the past intact, had held firmly to the upper-class traditions of behaviour, manners and dress of the Big House, once admired but now 'remote and introverted'.[179] As modern life developed around her, she retreated into a closed withdrawn world, until her eventual slow demise. Dillon highlights the emerging new order by creating in Gorestown a symbol for the developing Ireland, with Henebry, the personification of integrity, as the new incumbent in the local estate. Again with an unconcealed comparison of her protagonist's efforts to those of Sir Horace Plunkett, Henebry, now the re-incarnation of the kindly landlord, encourages the locals in a cooperative approach to share in new industrial development in the town and the prosperity that it will inevitably bring. This is a changed, more democratic world that justifies the sacrifice of the insurgents of 1916. Although Henebry had not fought for his country, he had done something just as valuable in that he 'held people together and caught their imagination', personifying a new form of peaceful leadership in a new age.[180]

Dillon attempts to recapture the ironic tone of *The Head of the Family* with her descriptions of the younger Henebrys, but their one-dimensional nature, each with an over-arching characteristic, makes them unconvincing. They can, however, be viewed as representative of the various facets of the emerging Ireland. Caroline, Henebry's daughter, can be seen as an 'oddity', liberal and outspoken, while Elizabeth, Daniel's wife, upholds a rigorous Catholic conservatism. Meanwhile, one son, Michael, becomes a dependable businessman essential to the new Ireland;

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[179] Dillon, *Bold* 96.
[180] Dillon, *Bold* 135.

another, Andrew, is weak, an alcoholic needing support; while the grandchildren form some hope for future generations. The greatest focus is on Daniel, the son of Henebry's first wife, who encapsulates the old and new elements of Irish life. Educated, lazy, selfish and scheming, he nonetheless had never lost 'his country forthrightness and the expressive words which he suppressed but simmered away in his brain',[181] and in his father's eyes, is still 'the source of his life' embodying the vitality and joy of an earlier time.[182] Dillon uses a clever device to differentiate between father and son by having Caroline paint portraits of them both, enabling a comparison of subtle differences in their facial features to detail John's sensitivity against Daniel's air of superiority.[183]

In this novel, Dillon again utilises the didactic voice that has become increasingly familiar. In concentrating on Daniel, the author turns her attention to matters of education and class, topics that allow her to express her well-established views. The painful memory of her deprivation of third-level education is once more revived with an envious remark on how, as an arts student in university, 'one could be a delightful mixture of man and boy, and enjoy endlessly the company of clever, enterprising, courageous young men'.[184] She also derides 'the snobbery of university people for those without degrees' and not coincidentally, in references to her own thwarted ambitions, projects onto Daniel, a wish to study French literature and to write a thesis on Balzac, and onto Michael, the desire to spend a year in Paris.[185] The rivalry between the two brothers regarding their learning capabilities may also mimic Dillon's relationship with her sisters and the perceived underestimation of her skills. While opportunities present themselves to develop certain themes, Dillon tends to gloss over them, evading insightful penetration of the characters' thoughts. For example, while introducing Daniel's 'sinful' affair in Paris and the attacks of Catholic conscience, the incident is resolved without effort, soul-searching or evidence of remorse, since the French woman Ginette is 'just a common trollop [...] and would be easily disposed of'.[186] While Dillon hints at the scandal that Daniel's affair caused, she fails to explore the enormous embarrassment that would have resulted for his conservative Catholic family. The character of Caroline also provides an opportunity for deeper analysis when she voices the opinion: 'I'm really afraid of women. They're not reliable. They never say exactly what they mean [...] They let you down afterwards with gossip and backbiting'.[187] This topic is neither given foundation nor explored in any depth but is one that recurs in Dillon's writing and may refer back to her difficulties in finding commonality with women in Cork during her young married life.

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[181] Dillon, *Bold* 57.
[182] Dillon, *Bold* 251-2.
[183] Dillon, *Bold* 132-4.
[184] Dillon, *Bold* 82-3.
[185] Dillon, *Bold* 85.

However, the novel's central message is that Henebry, with his adherence to tradition, can triumph because 'the best things never change'.[188] This is exemplified, as always with Dillon, through her character's reading matter. Like the author herself, having tried the new novelists and finding their preoccupation with the more sordid aspects of life, unreal and dishonest, he stayed true to the trusted Galsworthy, Walpole and Trollope.[189] Henebry, reflecting on the new generation and on Daniel's vulgar materialism, also turns to ancient Irish wisdom for solace. He recognises that his son, like many of his generation, is unable to take sound advice and will probably only acquire wisdom through what is known in the Irish language as '*ciall cheannaithe*' (bought wisdom), acquired solely through hard experience and attained only when he will be too old to benefit from it.[190]

Conclusion: The End of an Apprenticeship

With the publication of *The Head of the Family* and *Bold John Henebry*, Dillon had demonstrated that she had effected to some extent the transition from children's writer to adult novelist. While the former was criticised as 'a flabby story', 'overloaded' and 'failing to glow', Dillon was nonetheless lauded as 'a serious and ambitious novelist' and recognised as having a definite flair for keen observation and accurate description.[191] However, given the wit and irony of the first book and the more descriptive historical approach to the second, it is clear that, through experimentation, Dillon sought to establish an individual literary voice, as well as discover a vehicle through which to express it. Having explored a number of genres and still dissatisfied with her achievement, she wished to pursue a more long-term goal. Her mind was set on telling the truth, as she saw it, about Ireland's past through the historical sagas that she was determined to write. She asserts the imperative nature of this task as an innate duty: 'I was ready to tackle the themes that had been simmering in my mind for years. The country's history was undoubtedly the strongest. It went back to pre-consciousness, if such a state exists'.[192] Her own deeply-embedded, intuitive memories, both personal and familial, and by extension, nationalist, propelled her to embrace what she saw as her true *métier* – chronicler, not just of the fictional families – but of the Plunkett Dillon history assimilated into the history of her country.

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[186] Dillon, *Bold* 87.
[187] Dillon, *Bold* 203.
[188] Dillon, *Bold* 159.
[189] Dillon, *Bold* 188.
[190] Dillon, *Bold* 143.

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[191] *The Scotsman* [Edinburgh] 19 Mar. 1960.

[192] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 10.

Chapter Five

"The Bitter Glass" of Retrospection
in Dillon's Historical Novels

Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.
"The Two Trees", *The Rose*, WB Yeats (1893)[1]

Introduction

This chapter traces Dillon's further development in adult literature and, in particular, her decision to follow a path within historical fiction, through six novels set against a number of episodes that involved members of the Plunkett and Dillon families in important roles. These books, in which history and family memory intertwine, are also examined in the light of national commemoration and the nation's backward glance into its revolutionary past and the resulting 'bitter glass' of animosity and recrimination. In addition, they are assessed for their potential to counter cultural amnesia and for their function in fulfilling a mnemonic role within literature in recounting elements of the national tale. Dillon understood that a sense of nationalist fervour could be maintained by remembering those who had sacrificed themselves in various ways for Ireland. These novels communicate patriotism as it was expressed in various periods of Irish history and the ways in which it was celebrated by succeeding generations. They are examined within the framework of nationalist, commemorative and memory discourse for their ability to maintain a memory of the past, and to ensure its continuation into the future.

In 1958, at an early stage in her career, Dillon set her novel *The Bitter Glass* against the background of the Civil War in Ireland.[2] However, due to a lack of critical success, she subsequently practised with style and form, in what she deemed less controversial subject matter, before her return fifteen years later to another attempt at historical fiction for adults. With the publication of a further five historical novels over a fourteen-year period from 1973 onwards, Dillon aimed to recount, through her characters, the story of Ireland's struggle for independence and to highlight other significant periods in history. The most celebrated of these novels, *Across the Bitter Sea*, set against the background of Ireland's history from 1851 to 1916, will be treated in some detail here. This was followed by *Blood Relations*, an account of the after-effects of the Easter Rising of 1916; *Wild Geese*, the story of the Irish nobility's flight to France after 1691; and *Citizen Burke*, a chronicle of the problems of a conflicted Irish priest in post-revolutionary France and the Ireland of 1798. These works follow a circular chronology since Dillon begins with a novel set against the background of the Irish Civil War and then moves sequentially several centuries back in time to eventually return in *The Interloper* to the story of 1921–2.[3]

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[1] WB Yeats, "The Two Trees," (39-40) *The Works of WB Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994) 40.

[2] Dillon, *Bitter Glass* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958) (1st ed.) This ed. (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1981).

This final novel represents an important development for Dillon with a more direct presentation of events and a foregrounding of the historical context in the voices of her protagonists. Based on the recollections, not only of the characters, but also of the Plunkett Dillon household, this book forms a more personal commentary on the events of the time. It acts as a summary of Dillon's widely expressed beliefs about Ireland's historical development, while readdressing many of the themes that had previously surfaced, sometimes very briefly, in her earlier work.

Historical Fiction

As stated, the dual traditions of the historical novel and the national tale began in the early nineteenth century with the didactic novels of Maria Edgeworth and the work of Lady Morgan, followed by Emily Lawless and other writers who continued the tradition of depicting Ireland from their own cultural and religious standpoints. Meanwhile Catholic writers Gerald Griffin, Micheal Banim and William Carlton, in their development of the historical novel, provided a more realistic view of the life of the Irish peasantry, the hardships they endured and the customs they practiced. Katie Trumpener believes that the historical and national tales, although distinct, were intertwined in a 'generic fluidity' by sharing elements of setting, characterisation and plot. While the national tale maintained a conservative view of culture and an unbroken continuity largely undisturbed by political upheaval, the historical novel addressed the country's transformation under the pressure of historical events and demonstrated collective suffering and the often 'violent struggle between different possible future worlds'.[4]

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[3] Dillon, *Across the Bitter Sea* (London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973).
Dillon, *Blood Relations* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1978) (1st ed.) This ed. (London: Coronet, 1979).
Dillon, *Wild Geese* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980) (1st ed.) This ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981).
Dillon, *Citizen Burke* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984) (1st ed.) This ed. (London: Coronet, 1987).
Dillon, *The Interloper* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987) (1st ed.) This ed. (London: Coronet, 1989).

Although disliking generic labelling, Dillon followed in the tradition of Irish historical fiction as it evolved and adopted the conventions that attached to it, while incorporating a strong nationalist narrative. Cahalan explains that within the genre, Irish history is always presented as rife with conflict and divided by sharp societal extremes that are reflected in contrasting customs, dialects and beliefs. Historical fiction also introduces heroes who are representative of the Irish people, who engage in a noble struggle against colonial injustice and who often reflect the author's own views. Furthermore, this genre of fiction is understood in the context of the changing social and political conditions that the author wishes to underline.[5] Dillon adopts each of these conventions while continuing to integrate, in a more concentrated way, the tropes from Big House literature with which she had earlier experimented. While continuing to use to advantage her knowledge of the country house milieu, she also draws on other crucial family recollections. Dillon's relatives, with first-hand knowledge, were able to contribute vivid images of critical moments in Irish history, details of the real personages involved and of their impact on public opinion.

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[4] Katie Trumpener, "National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806-1830," *English Literary History* 60. 3, The John Hopkins University Press (Autumn, 1993): 685-731, 709 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/2873410 12 June 2011.

[5] James M. Cahalan, *Great Hatred, Little Room*: *The Irish Historical Novel* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983) 30.

The Role of Literature in National Commemoration

Dillon was writing in an independent Ireland in which the narrative of the country's heroic national struggle had to be reconceived in accordance with current realities, while simultaneously respecting the need for commemoration as well as the contradictory aspects of postcolonial amnesia. Since, as Anderson posits, the nation is 'an artifact of the human imagination, rather than an objective biological fact', and exists because people believe in it and wish it to continue, there is a continued need to reformulate the narrative that supports it.[6] The desire to maintain the nation and its identity demands reflection on its past. Politician, philosopher and orator Edmund Burke (1729–97) whom Dillon admired for 'his thoughtful and philosophic speeches',[7] was one of the first to articulate the interrelationship between the past, present and future, in the idea of 'the eternal society' – 'a partnership not only of those who are living', but also of 'those who are dead and those who are to be born'.[8] Burke advocated that a nation should be guided by tradition, believing that 'people will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors'.[9] This accepted view that nationhood is defined, maintained, revived and even resurrected through communal memory is summarised by Eberhard Bort who states that, if a national culture is to remain alive, its history too must live in some distinctive way and 'must be perceived as integral to the lives of those who share it'.[10]

In its many aspects, commemoration is instrumental in breathing life into national memory and acts as a form of 'social and cultural glue, collective reassurance' and 'shared beliefs of coherence and identity'.[11] In their efforts to survive, nations demonstrate collective or communal memory through various forms of commemoration that include anniversaries, monuments, museums and folk parks, venerated sites, buildings, streets and bridges, coinage and postage stamps. Literature can legitimately be added to this list, in that it fulfils a similar function in enabling the imagined community to endure. In keeping with other forms of commemoration, it too is always as firmly rooted in the present as it is in the past and is therefore open to current politicisation. Questions inevitably arise about what should be remembered and how. Current realities such as the political shade of government, the interest groups that it serves, the prosperity and values of the society and the appetite of its people for remembrance, can all exert influence. As a result, commemoration must be considered with a certain caution since, depending on its perceived acceptability, it can be either 'an unwanted burden, a hollow ritual, an ironic distancing of the past or a liberating celebration'.[12] The contrasting functions of commemorative practice are at the heart of Eilís Dillon's writing.

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[6] Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 13; 15.
[7] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 8.
[8] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* (London: Dodsley, 1790) 144.
[9] Burke 145.
[10] Eberhard Bort, ed. *Commemorating Ireland: History, Politics, Culture* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004) 2.
[11] Bort 2.

Commemoration is sometimes avoided by newly formed states which, in an effort to put shameful or disturbing episodes of the past behind them, engage in postcolonial amnesia or the will to forget. This strategy is evoked in an attempt 'to erase painful memories of colonial subordination' and simultaneously to aid in the development of a new national identity. In the interests of maturity, it is essential that the postcolonial state should overcome the silence or repression of memory by 'revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past'. Writers, being relatively free in their choice of subject and literary expression, can aid this therapeutic process of accessing the 'forgotten archive of the colonial encounter'.[13] Although open to criticism, derision or even ostracism, the writer is nonetheless able to commemorate events and confront issues in a personal way that may capture public imagination or approval. Literature, if it engages popular interest in a manner similar to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, can help quite forcibly to consolidate a nation's heritage and become 'embodiments of a memorial consciousness', without which, memory would be swept away. Fiction can similarly fulfil the function of rescuing and maintaining history and keeping it sacred for the people. As Nora states: 'Moments of history (are) torn away from the movement of history, then returned: no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded'.[14] By revisiting historical events, writers can, in a very compelling way, take on some of the responsibility for preserving and commemorating the past, while also creating their own version of it.

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[12] Bort 3.

[13] Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (St Leonard's NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998) 4.

Eilís Dillon highlights the enduring importance of literature as a form of remembering, and cites a typical ending to the ancient Greek tale of adventure: 'And at the end Aeneas said, "We had a hard time and a hard passage but it will be a pleasure to us in after days to remember these things"'.[15] Ireland's ancient oral tradition of story, song and poetry is also renowned for its commemoration of heroic deeds in epic poems and long ballads, and its lamentations of tragedy and hardship were used as a means of celebration or healing. Dillon, as noted, celebrates this oral tradition in many of her novels by the inclusion of ballads and songs in the text. This is significant, since poetry can be, as Gerald Dawe says, 'a call to remembrance'. The poet's added function as custodian and protector of the past is important since 'memory and vigilance, the past and protection, go hand in hand'.[16] By extension, since recollection is a continuous occupation in the creation of any literary tradition, writers within all genres become chroniclers of important events. Leerssen explains that historical consciousness in an effort 'to revive the present' can become 'a national enterprise'. He states: 'The reviving of history was performed time and again by writer after writer, each of them telling the old story afresh, like a needle stuck in the groove, in an uncanny recycling process of the past, of the old familiar, oft-told story of the past'.[17] However repetitive, such re-tellings, both oral and written, are useful in the historical preservation of 'cultural possessions' and can also be seen as a means of addressing the full story, providing 'a talking cure', a way of dealing with unfinished business and of coming to terms with outcomes that continue to affect the nation.[18] Literary works, while repositories of remembering, can also shape how history is viewed, by telling the story in an emotive or populist way so that it enters the collective consciousness and influences opinion on present day realities.

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[14] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History" 12.
[15] Dillon, 33352; Dillon, *Across the Bitter Sea* 74.
[16] Gerald Dawe, "A question of covenants: poetry as commemoration," in Bort 215.
[17] Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and imagination* 156.
[18] Dawe 216.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, writers continued using literature in a variety of genres both to commemorate and comment on national events. Even Yeats, who had looked mostly to the great legends of ancient times, was moved by the tragic events of his day to shift his gaze to the immediate political reality and held a mirror up to his times in his poems "Easter 1916" and "Meditation in Times of Civil War". As Ronald Schuchard states, 'the reality of violence and the nightmare of history suddenly became too great and too personal for myth to bear the strain'.[19] Writers of fiction also embraced this need to record the history of a period of turmoil and, as the century progressed, many novelists took on the added responsibility of historiographer, along with their literary role. The difficulty of merging the parallel, yet distinct, functions of history and literature as they seek a middle ground, can be summarised as follows:

> History is a record of characters and events; literature is an imagined creation of characters and events [...] art takes the real and gives it a shape not found in nature. Art in some sense tells lies, invents things, and yet aims at certain unempirical truths.[20]

This urge to recall the past, assert truths and narrate it for the future is deemed a necessity for the nation, as it moves further away from the founding episodes of the state. There is a developing and increasing need 'to re-examine the past, a greater need for reassurance and orientation', but also the urge and ability to address 'unfinished business' and an impulse to use the past as a 'benchmark to measure progress'. More importantly, there is a desire to 'tell the full story so that it can be laid to rest, not to be forgotten but perhaps to enable forgiveness'.[21] As previously noted, Dillon in her work for children underlined the need for reconciliation into the future.

Ireland's military history forms a catalogue of battles lost, risings suppressed, heroic personal sacrifices and struggles for survival. Few events can be regarded as truly celebratory when one considers the suffering and loss of life, but there is, nonetheless, as with personal memory, a compulsion to remember even the most difficult of times. Ireland, with its troubled past, has undertaken various methods of commemoration, some of which have met with dissent from interest groups. This is not unusual in that, as Stevenson states, 'even within a single nation, histories of the same episode may vary depending on ideology, religion, region, class or generation'. Some events continue to be celebrated. Others are forgotten and replaced with new ones 'that correspond to new or changing needs', as succeeding generations reinterpret their importance to society.[22]

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[19] Ronald Schuchard, "The Legacy of Yeats in Contemporary Irish Poetry," *Irish University Review* 34.2 (Autumn/Winter, 2004): 291-314, 293, 11 April 2010 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25504980.

[20] Christopher Murray, "Seán O'Casey: history into drama," in Bort 226.

[21] Murray 226.

Dillon and Commemoration

Eilís Dillon was acutely conscious of the significance of commemorative practices. She recalls the celebrations in 1929 of the centenary of Catholic Emancipation as a significant event in her childhood.[23] She was also alert to the historical and family importance of the 1798 Rising, which had been a catalyst for the emergence of the Young Ireland movement, co-founded by John Blake Dillon. This awareness seeps into her novels, particularly in *Citizen Burke*, which forms a commemoration of the efforts of the men of 1798 and is a eulogy for the priest leaders in County Wexford. The fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 was of more immediate importance to Dillon's family as recognition of the sacrifice made by Joseph Mary Plunkett. This national celebration took on 'a semi-sacred character' for the general population and was marked by a week of religious, military, literary and musical ceremonies, the unveiling of monuments and a seven-day radio and television tribute to the leaders of the rebellion.[24] Dillon's mother and aunt took part in radio documentaries in which they recalled the role of their brother in the Rising. Geraldine was also among the relatives of the signatories to the Proclamation to receive an honorary degree from the National University of Ireland, in Dublin Castle on 14 April 1966.[25] Coinciding with Ireland's economic recovery and its new status as a developing nation, the celebration provided inspiration in a new age. The remembrance of 1916 and the martyrdom of the leaders instilled a shared pride that was seen as central to the 'healing of the nation's wounds and the establishment of a stable democracy'.[26] Dillon, by committing to historical fiction, sought to maintain this commemorative spirit, present historical truth as she saw it, and keep national culture alive by telling the tale to a new generation of adult readers.

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[22] Garth Stevenson, "The Politics of Remembrance in Irish and Quebec Nationalism," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Canadian Political Science Association, 37. 4 (Dec. 2004): 903-925, 904, 13 Oct. 2010 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25165734.

[23] Dillon, *Inside* 16.

[24] Stevenson 919.

[25] RTÉ dedicated a week's programming to the events, including documentaries on Raidió Éireann, 11 Apr. 1966; 16 Apr. 1966.

Dillon fully embraced the role of custodian of the past with the six works examined in this chapter. These novels coincide with Stevenson's requirements for commemorative fiction in that they seek to: define the nation; reinforce a sense of pride in its achievements; evoke feelings of pity and indignation at the losses suffered; legitimise the actions of its leaders and inspire a belief that the nation will eventually triumph.[27] In these narratives Dillon fleshes out the bare bones of history, personalises it with family stories, and presents it through the lens of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the kindly landlord, as well as through that of the poorer Irish people of the west. Aware that many historical details of these ordinary lives can be easily forgotten and cast into national oblivion, she set about, in a conscious way, to preserve them through anecdotal material that she received, allied to her own meticulous research.

Although Dillon shares with other historical writers such as Liam O'Flaherty and Walter Macken the tendency to cover a broad span of history, she differs from them in avoiding the first half of the 1800s with the ebb and flow of intermittent revolutionary leadership and the horrific details of the Great Famine. While her previously noted rationale for omitting this period from her children's work as 'too harrowing an experience' is credible,[28] her further argument 'that it was too dreadful to write about' is less persuasive in relation to her adult books, since in most of them she includes some descriptions of the hardship, poverty and emigration that pervaded the west of Ireland at that time.[29] However, in excluding the Great Famine from her work, she imitated Yeats and Lady Gregory, neither of whom addressed it in their writing because it was 'not part of the Ireland they sought to celebrate'.[30] In doing this, and perhaps with a similar engagement in deliberate amnesia, Dillon leaves a conspicuous gap in the time-span that she covers in her work. She also denies herself the opportunity to convey, with her evident skill for detailed descriptions, the sadness and tragedy of the most significant event in nineteenth-century Irish history. It is also possible that since her family, as part of the landlord class, remained largely immune to the worst effects of the Famine, she did not have the first-hand knowledge she required to depict a truly impoverished peasant life. Nonetheless, her first historical novel dealt with an equally contentious and difficult period in Irish history, one that deeply affected her family.

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[26] Stevenson 920.
[27] Stevenson 905.
[28] Donncha Ó Dulaing, *RTÉ Guide* [Dublin] 15 Feb. 1974.
[29] *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 23 Dec. 1973.

The Bitter Glass (1958)

The Bitter Glass borrows its title from Yeats's metaphor for the backward-glancing bitterness and die-hard resolve that pertained during the Irish Civil War, which forms a backdrop to the story. The characters are young adults who find themselves isolated in a country house in rural Galway, due to the destruction of a local bridge by the IRA. They are then forced by circumstance to take on adult responsibilities towards twin babies in their care. In this book, Dillon repeats the device used in her children's books of removing the characters from more mature, adult influence and placing them in a location where they must fend for themselves. Indeed, one character, in a reminder of Dillon's teenage stories, states that being cut-off was almost as good as 'being on an island in a storm'.[31]

Just as Dillon's own childhood memories of the west were always in clear focus, the character Nora, one of the young adults in *The Bitter Glass*, 'could not imagine a time in which every single incident of her life would not stand out sharp and clear in her memory', and that she would never forget the 'people or their words'. Throughout this story, Dillon draws on memory to depict life in the Galway of the early 1920s as a world so apart that the protagonists experience 'a wave of peace on arrival'.[32] Dillon was praised for her descriptions of the wild stony countryside and her evocation of a special way of life, with 'sea and landscape, a lovely remote world of people and custom unforgettably described'.[33] She calls on the reader to engage all the senses as she evokes the details of the 'pale satiny blue' mornings, the soft gritty sand and the scent of seaweed and wild flowers. She also conjures up the atmosphere of simple, country living, of soda bread and turf fires, and bare-footed, pipe-smoking Peggy in the traditional dress of plaid shawl and red petticoat, among the mixed smells of turf smoke, hen and cabbage water.[34] Dillon, using a traditional trope in Irish fiction,[35] draws directly on her particular childhood memories for her realistic portrayal of a wake, the primitive traditions that attached to it and the 'wake games' that were played.[36] The representation is highly romanticised, for example, in the descriptions of the ballad as 'a melancholy tune like a slow march' and the character Sarah as embodying the fate of the Irish soul, her 'eyes never quite free of an ancient, hereditary melancholy like a Byzantine madonna'. Similarly, the *caoineadh*, 'an undulating, high-pitched, wordless song', expresses 'a lonely, sad resignation which penetrated deep into the bone and shivered through their being'.[37] Dillon's synopsis of the novel makes interesting reading, since she sets the story in a cinematic way, describing 'the opening scene' and 'scenes we have just witnessed'. This is a possible indication of events observed and of images remembered accurately from her time in Galway, with close descriptions of western locations and the Connemara people as 'an integral part of those scenes'.[38]

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[30] Colm Tóibín, *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush* (London: Picador, 2010) 32.
[31] Dillon, *Bitter* 33.

The focus in the book is on the characters in a claustrophobic setting, while the political background is treated with what one critic describes as a theatrical 'noises off' approach.[39] The only significant contact with the struggle raging outside is when the young people give shelter to 'a flying column' – an event that leads the aloof Colman to eventually betray his group of friends. Dillon takes the opportunity to contrast the evils of civil war, 'a bitter evil thing in itself' and unlikely 'to generate chivalry', against the romantic ideals of the heroes of the 1916 Rising whose vision led them into an honourable fight. The conflict, presented as being fought by 'die-hards' entrenched in their own partisanship, is in direct counterpoint to the nobler struggle of the 1916 rebels. Through one of her characters, Dillon explains that the latter, as 'scrupulous amateur soldiers', had the 'misfortune of possessing an Irish conscience', and having killed in war, felt that 'they could never again look their God in the face'. She further articulates through her protagonists the moderate views of the Dillon family after the Civil War, their opinions on the obligation to progress, on the need to forget the fighting and to build a new Ireland, since otherwise there would be more 'good blood wasted' like that of their friends and comrades.[40]

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[32] Dillon, *Bitter* 47; 57; 9.
[33] *The Spectator* [London] 6 June 1958.
[34] Dillon, *Bitter* 14; 156.
[35] The wake was described, for example, with some significance in Lady Morgan's, *The Wild Irish Girl*.
[36] Mervyn Wall, Transcript, Raidió Éireann broadcast, 16 July 1958; Dillon, *Inside* 101. Dillon recalls learning wake games from local children in Galway.
[37] Dillon, *Bitter* 127; 14; 178.
[38] Dillon, 33249, "*The Bitter Glass*, Synopsis" 1–2.
[39] JMK, "A Novel of the West," *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 28 June 1958.

Although from privileged backgrounds, most of the characters in the group, through their experience and openness of mind, come to understand the decency and wisdom of the Connemara people. They accept local girl Sarah and her mother as the embodiment of wisdom and common sense, as representatives of the true values of Ireland and contrary to their earlier impression of the local community as 'ignorant peasants'.[41] Nora, upper-class but intuitive and sensitive, also recognises in Joe Thornton a man who, although educated in Dublin, still bears the virtues of the western community from which he came. Their engagement, in a union reminiscent of Morgan's *Wild Irish Girl* and, in a symbol of a new Ireland, effects a merging of two interdependent cultures. Writer Mervyn Wall describes the novel as 'a simple tale for simple adults' and this is supported by the fact that the storyline, continuing in the mode of Dillon's children's novels, is not nuanced enough for the adult reader. Critics describe 'a kind of static feeling' that 'seems to shackle the whole narrative'[42] with unnecessary description hindering the storyline.[43] Strangely, Dillon is commended by an American reviewer for this 'perceptive book in which the interior struggles of the characters are highlighted, not swamped by the plot', as they leave childhood 'sadder but wiser'.[44] In fact, the inner mental wrestling does not take precedence and the eventual arrival at clarity of thinking is shown rather abruptly, without evidence of the thought process that might have preceded it. A description of Dillon 'as an oddly withdrawn writer' strikes a chord, as she typically avoids such insightful soul-searching.[45] While Cahalan aptly describes Dillon's characterisation and use of history as 'almost too thin' to allow this book to qualify as a historical novel, as a first foray into the genre, it was a preparation for the more ambitious narratives with which she later engaged.[46]

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[40] Dillon, *Bitter* 198; 11; 141; 113.
[41] Dillon, *Bitter* 205.
[42] Elizabeth Cade, "Dublin in Time of Troubles," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 Oct. 1959.
[43] Wall, Transcript, 16 July 1958.

The hiatus of fifteen years before Dillon returned to the genre is explained by the criticism that she received for her depiction of the local doctor in *The Bitter Glass* as a confirmed drug addict. The critic pointedly wondered 'if Miss Dillon had ever heard of the old proverb in the west which says, "It is a foolish ass which eats its own straddle mat"', implying that one should not denigrate one's own people.[47] While Dillon poked fun at this attack, she interpreted it as a warning from reviewers that she had 'blasphemed in writing a novel about that period at all'.[48] It was much later in her career when she finally returned to historical fiction, this time attempting, as Wall had advised, to 'explore greater depths' and to 'seize her story with greater vigour'.[49]

Across the Bitter Sea (1973)

This greater vigour emerged in the early 1970s when Dillon, in being commissioned by British and American publishers to write a historical novel, realised her often-articulated and long-held ambition to present a chronology of Irish history, while simultaneously commemorating her family.[50] By this time Ireland had undergone such rapid development in political, economic and social terms that the older Ireland could be viewed nostalgically from the comfort of a more liberal and prosperous lifestyle. Distance in time and an improvement in the quality of life, allowed the reader to observe the nation's struggle in a way made palatable in the guise of historical novels. This was also a time when a new wave of historical fiction with wide popular appeal began to materialise in Ireland. Among the best-selling publications were Thomas Kilroy's *The Big Chapel* (1971) based on a clerical scandal in Victorian Ireland, James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969), the story of Dublin's impoverished working classes between 1907 and 1914, and JG Farrell's *Troubles* (1970), which described the War of Independence from the viewpoint of a British Army major.

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[44] LC Etter, "Some Grew Up, Some Withdrew," *Houston Post*, 10 Apr. 1959.
[45] "Women in Love," *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 11 Apr. 1958.
[46] Cahalan 220.
[47] JMK, "A Novel of the West," *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 28 June 1958.
[48] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 27.
[49] Wall, Transcript, 16 July 1958.
[50] Hodder & Stoughton in the USA, and Simon & Schuster in Great Britain.

With *Across the Bitter Sea*, Dillon sought to join the ranks of these successful novelists while also aiming to do justice to the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to celebrate its heroes and, in the process, to educate her readers about Ireland's struggle for independence. However as noted, in literature, as in all efforts at commemoration, the contemporary political situation is liable to intrude. Dillon explains that the renewed conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s had made her 'a little doubtful' about embarking on this book. However, on balance and with didactic purpose, she decided to continue with it on the basis that the novel, set against the background of earlier efforts to address the national question, would be helpful in explaining the current conflict to a foreign audience.[51] Indeed, following its publication in 1973, reviewers were quick to point to the links between past and present. One remarked that 'Ireland is a country whose history is no less tragic than her cruel and murderous present' and claimed that the book was 'testimony to this harsh fact'.[52] Benedict Kiely questioned the wisdom of Dillon's use of Yeats's words from "The Rose Tree" for the book's title and epigraph. Linking this poem, which refers to the blood sacrifice of the leaders of the 1916 to the contemporary Northern conflict, Kiely believes that 'to talk of watering rose trees with our own red blood' can only serve as a grim reminder of those 'who fill their watering-cans with the blood of other innocent people and scatter it broadcast'.[53]

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[51] "The book Eilís did not want to write at first," [Newspaper Article] N.p., N.d. in Dillon, 33352.
[52] "Irish Sorrows," *The Glasgow Herald*, 23 Feb. 1974.
[53] Benedict Kiely, "A Galway Chronicle," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 Feb. 1974.

Dillon, with her apprenticeship in crime and literary novels completed and eager for a fresh challenge, was determined to tell this story. Back in Ireland after seven years in Italy, she felt somewhat liberated from her earlier inhibitions and noted that, since 'writing had become a respectable occupation', she could embark with new confidence and 'without fear' on this novel.[54] She also had the support of O'Faoláin, 'still a fighter in his old age', who was endlessly full of praise rather than criticism.[55] She remembers that he was delighted to help and 'wrote many letters urging her to shed her early sensitivities'.[56] She explains his interest, saying that O'Faoláin 'hated waste' and was worried that her 'personal misfortunes' would stop her from writing. She recalls that he used to telephone her almost every day and was always keen to comment on her drafts. She also remembers his 'overwhelming' generosity, describing him, as he did himself, as 'a born meddler' in the positive sense of interfering for the good of another.[57] Cahalan identifies parallels between Dillon's book and O'Faoláin's novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1933), since they both deal with the same historical period, provide extensive family background and each have as protagonist a Fenian who survives to witness the Easter Rising. It was viewed at the time as 'inevitable' that Dillon should undertake a book of this kind, since she 'was born of a family where patriotism and sacrifice were of the everyday, and whose mother encouraged her family to study and imbibe their past'.[58] The family link is further underlined in her choice of the year 1851 as the starting point of the novel because it coincided with the birth of her grandfather, thereby allowing her to avail of family narratives and, perhaps coincidentally, avoid the Famine years.

Ambitious Aims

Dillon set herself a number of ambitious aims in approaching historical fiction for the second time. She explains her urge 'to make the past live again, to show how it was to be there, by means of sounds and smells and details of dress and behaviour'. In these novels she could expand on the depictions of the lives and manners of the faded gentry in town and country-house settings presented in her earlier fiction. Believing that the novelist has the edge over the historian in bringing the past alive, she contends that historians, in general, are 'positively trained to suppress any tendency to bring the reader right inside the narrative, almost as if it were a trick unworthy of a scholar'.

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[54] Kiely, *Irish Times*, 16 Feb. 1974.
[55] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 37.
[56] Kiely, *Irish Times*, 16 Feb. 1974.
[57] *Arts Express*, Television Programme, 23 April 1991, RTÉ Archive.
[58] Donncha Ó Dulaing, *RTÉ Guide* [Dublin] 15 Feb. 1974.

She is, however, critical of some historical novels, particularly of those 'badly written romances with no pretensions to being literature and with inaccurate historical backgrounds', seeing these as 'really only daydreams' that 'should not be used as a standard'.[59] Dillon is scathing of the 'massive errors' of the very successful Leon Uris in his bestseller *Trinity* (1976) and the 'vulgar flamboyance' used to heighten tension and to introduce a 'hysterical note'. In particular, she disparages his 'loathing and lack of knowledge' of the Catholic practices of the Rosary and the Angelus and the depiction of a wake as a sex orgy. She further points out that Victorian employers, however nasty, would not have used 'the filthy language' he ascribes to them. Dillon was very particular in choosing role models for her historical fiction, declaring that she found some Irish writers like Francis McManus 'a little too simple in adult life'.[60] Instead she turned to the great international writers for inspiration. Having learned 'unconsciously' from them through her reading, she was prepared to write a novel with 'a much bigger scene and a much larger series of events' than she had attempted previously. Her admiration for Stendhal's 'nearly modern way of handling historical background', encouraged her to be ambitious both in the scale of what she wanted to write and in the criteria she aimed to fulfil,[61] while she claims that Tolstoy gave her courage 'to lengthen scenes and occurrences'.[62]

Dillon asserts that she had always 'been specially interested in the impact of great events on the ordinary person', believing that 'to chronicle events in a void, without taking heed of the pressures and pains they caused, and the long-term effect on the daily texture of life, is to lose an essential dimension of history'.[63] She extols the capacity of literature to highlight 'the way in which private lives are arbitrarily upset by the decisions of dictators, kings, emperors, politicians and petty despots' and she sought to do this in an Irish context.[64] In her novel outline, she explains that *Across the Bitter Sea* would concern itself with the development of the characters, 'with their marriages and their differing political views, conservative and extremist, and the conflict between these two groups'. It would track political change in Ireland, highlight connections with America and 'selectively show a hardening of nationalism in conflict with peaceful agitation'. Her inclusion of Parnell's funeral would be used to 'unite the whole family, at least temporarily, in determination to work for freedom, by violent means if necessary', until, in the last section, 'bitterness and wrangling and strife break out again'. It is evident from her story synopsis that she intended that history would not just form a background for the novel but would actually be a core element in the lives of her characters.

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[59] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 2; 1; 2.
[60] Dillon, Letter, 21 Jan. 1981, quoted in Cahalan "Historical".
[61] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 3-4.
[62] Dillon, Letter, 21 Jan. 1981, qted in Cahalan "Historical".
[63] Dillon, 33342, "Folk Memory as History: The Irish Tradition" 27.

Apart from creating an expansive historical narrative, Dillon set another challenge for herself. She claimed, despite evidence to the contrary in her work to date, to harbour a long-held ambition to analyse sexual and emotional issues. She describes undertaking *Across the Bitter Sea* as a 'dangerous' turning point and compares the task to embarking onto 'new and perilous seas', for which she admitted a need for encouragement to help her to overcome her 'last piece of reserve and write about the feelings of women'. Conceding that she had always, in the interests of objectivity, struggled with this aspect of writing, she states in a possible reference to her personal inhibitions in writing of sexuality: 'I had always avoided this, perhaps out of a need to distance myself from the subject'. By the 1970s, however, she expressed the desire to do as O'Faoláin had done, that is, to attempt to describe 'what was happening to real men and women [...] to show the intimacies and depths of their hearts, to reveal fearlessly the things that happen in the secret parts of the mind'.[65]

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[64] Dillon, 33321, "Ballinalee - The Historical Novel with Special Reference to Ballinalee" 3.

[65] Dillon, 33329, "Seán O'Faoláin" 42.

Reliance on Family Memory

Espousing these serious aspirations, Dillon embarked with enthusiasm on what was her most challenging work so far. However, the writing of *Across the Bitter Sea* coincided with a very difficult time in her life, when her first husband Cormac was terminally ill.[66] Although unwell, Cormac was of enormous help to Dillon and she recalls in interview:

> I think that writing the book was the only way I could have got through that period, because we were both so intensely interested in the subject that we weren't as depressed as we might have been. In a strange way I also feel that I wouldn't have written the book if I hadn't started it when my husband was alive.[67]

Despite her personal difficulties, Dillon approached the work with discipline, working methodically, completing a fixed number of pages per day, in chapters of similar length, eventually leading to a five hundred-page publication. From the outset, the work was rigidly outlined. The narrative was planned to focus on the 'personal story of the characters', the Flahertys of Moycullen, and was set against the political and social background of the period 1851 to 1916. The story would include and amplify the issues merely alluded to in *Bold John Henebry*, namely, the Fenian movement, the emergence of new leaders, the planning of the 1916 Rising and, in a contradiction of her views on harrowing material, 'the various famines and the evictions that were a constant feature of life in Ireland then'.[68]

For this, and subsequent books, Dillon diligently checked historical detail by consulting archives, newspaper reports, a wide range of literary sources and family narratives. Copious notes found in her files, documenting her approach to the writing of *Across the Bitter Sea*, are a testament to her commitment and devotion to the project. She praises the newspaper accounts as coming from a time 'when reporters really reported', when 'they took down verbatim exactly what was said and by whom and they let the facts speak for themselves'. In the interests of authenticity and colour, she accessed newspaper advertisements from 1863 which gave prices of tailoring, of shawls and straw bonnets, bed and breakfast rates, and wages for footmen and cooks in big houses. She researched the fashion notices of that time for details of hats, gowns, fabrics and styles. Regarding such exploration as essential, she writes that she would have had no respect for it unless she had checked all the facts and events thoroughly, adding that 'this is extremely difficult to do and never completely successful'. Her extensive investigative effort is apparent in the lengthy list of resource material that she borrowed from the library of the Royal Dublin Society, which included biographies of Parnell, Pearse, Collins and Charles Gavan Duffy, as well as books on the Land League, the IRB and other organisations of that time. However, she was well aware that, despite all the useful records at her disposal, 'the narrative and the connective tissue', as well as 'a credible atmosphere' would have to be supplied and created by herself as the writer. In this, she had much more than official sources could provide – she had family memory.[69]

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[66] The book is dedicated to his memory.

[67] "Woman's Place in the Front Line," Interview with Eilís Dillon, *Evening Press* [Dublin] 15 Feb. 1974.

[68] Dillon, 33352, "Drafts".

Dillon evidently consulted with an unacknowledged source, probably her husband, who provided useful suggestions on a wide range of issues. One hand-written comment in her files indicates that the choice of John Donne and Ben Johnson is unsuitable reading material for the Irish country schoolmaster in the novel and should be replaced with Cowley, Addison or Thomas Parnell. Another suggests that the use of the word 'humanism' is too modern and 'breaks the historical illusion'. A further recommendation states that 'no lady would eat in a restaurant'. Other notes written in a shaky hand, possibly that of Dillon's ageing mother who was a first-hand witness to many of the events depicted, refer to items or people that could be integrated into the story. The amount of detail is staggering and is indicative of the problem facing Dillon in deciding which elements to incorporate in what inevitably became a very large piece of work. These include: 'the theft of the Crown Jewels from Dublin Castle', 'faction fighting', 'the Left-leggers on the West Cork Railway', 'Moore's melodies in drawing room', 'Dripsey Paper Mills', 'Thady Quill', 'TB families', 'spoiled priests', 'boycott of teachers and priests', 'polo in the Phoenix Park', 'advent of telephones', 'Gombeen man versus co-op'. There are also obvious prompts regarding her own family and a suggestion that Plunketts, Dillons and Sullivans could 'be neighbours or vaguely related', to 'the Countess on honeymoon in Texas', 'cousin Beatrice who married the renegade Jesuit', 'cousin Myles who became a major in the Boer War' and 'the cousin who ran away to sea and ended up as leader in Tammany Hall'.[70]

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[69] Dillon, 33352, "Drafts".

These vignettes must have proved extremely useful in providing historical detail, although other family memories were equally valuable to Dillon in creating the larger political panorama. The 'credible atmosphere' that she sought to provide, derives to a great extent, from knowledge and background supplied anecdotally to her. The Plunkett Dillon history, as it links into the history of the nation, is at the very heart of this book, with family stories used to flesh out the historical facts. She had family knowledge of Parnell's funeral, which her grandfather had attended, as well as of the meeting of the First *Dáil* in 1919 in Dublin's Mansion House, which he addressed. Dillon's mother, Geraldine, was also present at that meeting and claimed to have seen Michael Collins in attendance and to have watched him enter the building through a back door.[71] Since this sighting of Collins has never been verified by any other source, Dillon wisely omitted it from her story, an indication of her wish to record accurately rather than use uncorroborated evidence.

The incident serves to illustrate that the basing of historical events on family memory is insufficient and not without its limitations. As folklore expert Jan Vansina points out, eyewitness accounts are notoriously unreliable, are always subjective and involve not only perception but also emotions. Objectivity can be lost, events distorted over time, and opinion and outlook changed over the intervening years. Reminiscences, as episodes from life history, are deeply personal, causing the narrator to be selective in transmitting information about the times in which they lived, the people whom they admired and about the family itself. Vansina explains:

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[70] Dillon, 33352, "Drafts".
[71] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 270.

> They are essential to a notion of personality and identity. They are the image of oneself one cares to transmit to others. Reminiscences are then not constituted by random collections of memories, but are part of an organized whole of memories that tend to project a consistent image of the narrator and, in many cases, a justification of his or her life.[72]

Events and situations that prove to be embarrassing or inconvenient are often omitted, ignored or reshaped, depending on 'the part they play in the creation of this mental self-portrait'. Vansina clarifies that some memories are for the private purposes of a family, 'others are for public consumption'.[73] This is particularly applicable to Dillon's noted family histories since, both the Plunketts and Dillons, having contributed publicly to Ireland's story for eight centuries were therefore part of the country's historical tapestry. For these families, it was not merely a case of keeping alive the deeds of their ancestry but of communicating their own interpretations of those deeds. Their accounts of dealings with Irish political and cultural leaders were much more than the usual 'historical gossip' that occurs within families but were of national importance and deemed significant enough to share with the nation.[74] Dillon, undoubtedly inspired and influenced by the memory of her parents' stories and the impressions that she gleaned at close range, recalls: 'I grew up in the midst of unending discussions and arguments about what happened when, what incident led to what other one'.[75]

Dillon, working on a very broad canvas, provides a sense of the times, of the political unrest, the miserable poverty of the tenants and the contrast between their circumstances and those of the privileged landed gentry. However, she had always professed to eschew realism, vehemently asserting: 'realism is not for me at all'.[76] Yet, in an obvious contradiction, she also confesses, 'I've used all my experiences in my writings, even my most painful ones'.[77] Claiming also not to describe real locations, she asserts: 'I find my writing never works if I describe an actual place'.[78] Nonetheless, the places of her own past seem to be immune, since they are an integral feature in her novels and she writes of Galway: 'Though I left it as a child I have used it over and over again throughout my working life'. Remembering also the peacefulness of Connemara she says: 'These silences made an immense impression on me when I was young, and undoubtedly the main reason why I was able to envisage the Moycullen House of *Across the Bitter Sea'.* She admits that the Moycullen House of her novels is modelled on Dangan House, her childhood home, and that, with a 'novelist's freedom', and perhaps with received memory of similar houses, she 'made it grander'.[79] Even the name Moycullen is significant as it was the home of Elizabeth Burke, later the Countess of Fingall, who married into the Plunkett family and whose memoir is cited earlier in this study.[80] The Flahertys who are central to the novel, derive from an old Connacht family, prefaced with an O', who were, in real life, the embodiment of the good landlord.[81] Dillon describes her Flahertys as 'landlords in name only, charging tiny rents or none at all', improving the tenants' cottages, providing free meals and hated by peers 'who saw impossible standards being set'.[82]

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[72] Jan M. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 4.
[73] Vansina 8.
[74] Vansina 17.
[75] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 8.
[76] Kay Kent, *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1974.
[77] "Woman's Place in the Front Line," *Evening Press*, 15 Feb. 1974.

Yet these references to actual families is set against Dillon's alleged antipathy to the inclusion of historical figures in her fictionalised accounts. Her dilemma lay in the fact that many of the protagonists were not only controversial national figures but were, at some point, also family friends. She admits to 'a fear of letting them down', of not doing them justice, or perhaps of leaving her family exposed to criticism. In principle, she was against the placement of real people in her novels but believed that, in the interests of authenticity, it was sometimes essential to provide a role for them. She felt an obligation toward public figures, stating: 'I had great difficulty in using these people as actors in my books, not that it seemed an impertinence because after all they belong to history now'. The omission of such important historical characters is unfortunate since, for example, she had an impeccable source in Count Plunkett who knew Parnell well and often talked about him. As mentioned, another family member, John Dillon MP, was also a staunch Parnell associate until the terminal rift occurred within the Irish Party. Eilís Dillon, aware from childhood of the impact that Parnell had on the public and of the 'mysterious force' of his personality, found this familiarity to be a disincentive in attempting to portray such an iconic figure. In some ways, she fell between personal and received memory since, as she states, 'she had never heard the sound of his voice' and was unwilling to recreate his presence in case of misrepresentation.[83] The exclusion of Parnell, however, indicates a selective omission since, in later books, Dillon used other historical figures within her fiction. This may have been due to Parnell's close association with her family and the fact that his career ended in tragic circumstances on which the Dillons and Plunketts held opposing views.

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[78] Kay Kent, *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1974.
[79] Dillon, 33318, "Western Writer" 2.
[80] Elizabeth Mary Margaret Burke of Moycullen (later Elizabeth Countess of Fingall).
[81] Obituary of George E. O' Flaherty Esq. JP, *Galway Express*, 24 Mar. 1906. Flaherty is described as an 'exceptionally good and considerate landlord', 'held in high esteem'. The article is included among Dillon's notes.
[82] Dillon, 33253, "*Blood Relations* Drafts".

Aims Fulfilled

Despite her wish to draw the reader into the narrative, Dillon's manner of conveying historical information can be distracting. In what seem like casual references or insignificant details within conversational exchanges overloaded with fact, nuggets of historical information that verify the authenticity of Dillon's research often go unnoticed. For example, her tantalisingly brief mention of the loss in 1851 of the sailing ship *Edmund*, is a good example of accurate research mentioned only incidentally.[84] Conversely, Dillon's efforts to educate the reader through more lengthy dialogues intrude on the story. One of Dillon's family, in a critique of an early draft of *Across the Bitter Sea*, writes: 'When did moralizing begin? Cut the cackle and get on with the story'.[85] It appears that Dillon failed to heed this good advice. While the idea of moralising was anathema to her own idea of herself as writer, this persistent tendency was one of her greatest weaknesses. Intent on presenting elements of Ireland's history, her authorial voice intrudes as, adopting the tone of the lyrical and kindly mentor used in her children's books, she counsels her characters. She imposes on them her own patriotic obligation to country and exhorts them to 'remember you are an Irishman, part of a great old nation, one that walked this land before the dawn of history'.[86] She explains, 'it all comes down to love, love of Ireland'.[87]

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[83] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 9; 9; 6; 6.
[84] Dillon, *Across* 52.
[85] Dillon, 33352, "Drafts".

Dillon had, as previously mentioned, declared her aim to convey honestly the inner feelings of women in this book. Focusing on the main character, Alice, she articulates her views on the ill-treatment of women within relationships, describing her as someone 'who has courage for anything'[88] but considered by men as 'a commodity, an article of high value to be sold at her proper price'[89] and deemed to be 'like a bone between dogs when the men want her'.[90] However, Alice, in love with one man and bound by duty to another, appears rather passive in this regard and marries the landlord Samuel because he will look after her. She accommodates to her situation with dignity, remains a comfortable companion to her husband, although in a show of independence takes care of their tenants and seeks justice for them. Dillon, despite her stated intentions, fails to impart successfully Alice's innermost thoughts, feelings and 'the intimacies and depths' of the heart. As a result the character struggles with the implausible romantic triangular relationship that 'never erupts into hatred or gets destroyed by bitterness and guilt'.[91] Indeed in several books, Dillon includes this triangular love trope that was often used metaphorically in relation to Ireland, wherein the nation is usually presented as a woman with rival suitors, each representing a potential, different direction for a future Ireland. In this case, Samuel is a well-meaning Anglo-Irish landlord, representative of a disappearing world, while Morgan, the Fenian freedom fighter, is the personification of an independent Ireland.

When it is suggested by reviewers that Alice, in such conservative times, gives herself too easily to her illicit lover without any evident great sexual scruple, Dillon's justification is that she professes to having a deep understanding of the people of Connemara and to knowing 'that those people had a healthy pagan attitude towards sex underlying their Catholicism'.[92] In an affirmation of Dillon's belief in the traditional aristocracy of the island communities, Alice spends time on Aran Mór Island learning from a wise local woman how to behave as the lady of the Big House should. However, despite her initial aim to communicate the inner feelings of women, Dillon is evasive and clichéd in her descriptions of sexual encounters, which do nothing to further the reader's understanding of the individual emotional lives of her characters. They seem to mainly feed the allegorical link with Ireland's nationalist cause while possibly appealing to a popular readership.

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[86] Dillon, *Across* 307.
[87] Dillon, *Across* 444.
[88] Dillon, *Across* 62.
[89] Dillon, *Across* 80.
[90] Dillon, *Across* 119.
[91] Kay Kent, *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1974.
[92] Kay Kent, *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1974.

The Novel Reviewed

In general, *Across the Bitter Sea* was well received and achieved bestseller status. It was particularly popular abroad, with 15,000 copies being sold in the USA within three weeks.[93] Dillon saw this novel as a breakthrough in her career as an adult novelist and she declared with obvious pride in her achievement: 'I'm very happy with it and it has certainly been the hardest work of any book I've written but I'm still intending to do better'.[94] This and her later historical novels were also seen as a more lucrative enterprise since, in receiving far greater acclaim than her previous work, they would prove to be more 'financially rewarding' than the children's books which up to then had provided the bulk of her earnings.[95] When asked about her children's writing, Dillon sounded, for once, slightly dismissive, saying: 'These I enjoy as a relaxation from the more serious themes and as adding variety to my output'.[96] This comment does not reflect her declared commitment to children's literature but, at the same time, may be an honest self-appraisal of her long-held ambition to be regarded as a writer of adult fiction.

Across the Bitter Sea was praised for its panoramic scope, the depth of the author's research of a 'crowded and complicated period', with 'detailed descriptions of custom and usage' and 'the evocation of the physical landscape of nineteenth century Ireland'.[97] Benedict Kiely deemed the work a 'long leisurely novel' with 'lucid restful prose' and as 'sharply-observed', containing 'details of ordinary life that are not often among the stock-in-trade of the chronicle'. He praises her extensive 'historical homework' and her depiction of the people and the countryside, suggesting that there is 'a fine pagan flow about their story'. Significantly, Kiely also sees the novel as educational and says that he would choose the book to send to 'foreign friends to introduce them easily to 60 or 70 years of our history'. However, while he says it is 'readable, accurate, without prejudice', he points out the predictability of the story, since 'every historical character, Parnell, Pearse, Larkin, must like the widow Flaherty, step out and take a bow!'. He criticises the fact that 'the explosion of 1916 comes too aptly, like wedding bells at the end of an old-fashioned popular romance', deeming this unfortunate, 'because 1916 was not as we know, simply a happy ending'.[98] Yet Kiely does not take account of the Plunkett Dillon compulsion to justify the blood sacrifice of the rebellion and for a happy ending to make it all worthwhile. The book has also been rightly criticised for the breadth of its time span leading it be read almost as a historical survey and moving too quickly from one major event to the next.[99]

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[93] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 41.
[94] Kay Kent, *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1974.
[95] Seán Breslin, "Unrealised Past", *Irish Press*, [Dublin]4 May 1978.
[96] Eric Hicks, "Interview with Eilís Dillon," *Trade News*, N.p., 2 Mar. 1974.

Journalist Con Houlihan reviewed the novel in scathing terms, declaring it 'a tragic book'. For him, the tragedy was that it could have been a great novel but that it ended up as 'an amorphous pudding cooked up for that invisible, but economically potent sector of humanity - the general reader'. With evident hyperbole, he praises the early part of the novel saying that it reminds him of 'the first meal of early potatoes [...] real potatoes tasting of the earth and the country green, dance and Connemara song and peasant mirth'. He claims that the first few chapters so delighted him that he wanted to send up smoke signals to declare that a splendid new discovery had been made. However, his tone changes radically in describing the latter part of the book where, in his view, 'inspiration yields to calculation', as realisation sinks in that the work has been commissioned. He complains that 'commercialism is rarely attractive – and it is especially saddening when it causes the dissipation of fine talents'.[100] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin admits that being commissioned to write the book was certainly appealing to her mother from a financial point of view during her father's illness but it appears that this was genuinely not the main incentive.[101] Houlihan's accusation of 'calculation' seems very much at odds with the evidence of Dillon's commitment to the project and the genuine affection that she held for her topic. It also highlights the common dilemma posed for any writer seeking literary excellence while simultaneously facing the publisher's demand for popularity and sales figures.

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[97] James Plunkett, "After the Coffin Ship," Rev. of *Across the Bitter Sea* by Eilís Dillon, *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 16 Feb. 1974.
[98] Benedict Kiely, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 Feb. 1974.
[99] Cahalan, *Historical* 194.

There were more justifiable comments from other reviewers, including reference to 'some gaucheness in the handling of the passage of time'[102] and the fact that 'the history dwarfs the characters' personalities'.[103] Nevertheless, there was general praise for Dillon's sense of place and, as one reviewer writes, 'Dillon knows her Galway past and present, down to the simplest details of country life and love, and it is moments like this that give the book an excellent quality'.[104] Another commentator, with great insight, believes that 'certain dates in Irish history, Easter 1916 for example, are still, as it were, happening in her soul; and probably will go on happening'.[105] Given family participation on those dates, Dillon was unlikely to forget them and went on to ensure that readers of her next book, *Blood Relations*, would not either.

Blood Relations (1978)

In a clear celebration of family memory, Dillon embarked on *Blood Relations*, the sequel to *Across The Bitter Sea*, dedicating the novel to her mother in acknowledgement of her participation in the events of 1916 and in the War of Independence. Dillon's stated intention was to connect with future generations, by informing them of what she perceived as the national success that derived from this time in Irish history.[106] In this novel, Dillon reinforces the narrative strands of the previous book by continuing with the story of the next generation of Flahertys as they deal with the immediate aftermath of the Rising. In this novel, through the Goulds,[107] a Protestant neighbouring family who are the 'remnants of gentility', 'ruined by stupidity and greed' and 'still clinging to the myth of their superiority', Dillon addresses issues of class and social isolation.[108] In her notes, she remarks that such families would have done better if they had been Catholics, since they could have felt free to marry people 'of any class'.[109] The novel also includes more romantic triangles with the character Molly Gould vacillating between three lovers, a scenario that in Dillon's conservative hands is, as Cahalan states, 'not as risqué as it sounds'.[110] While Dillon was aware that a small number of women had participated in the 1916 Rising, she expressed a wish to explore the feelings of those women who, left behind in time of war, were most deeply affected by it.[111] In spite of family insight into the active role of women, Molly is presented as a passive bystander.

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[100] Con Houlihan, "In the Country of the Heart," *Hibernia Review of Books*, 15 Feb. 1974.
[101] Ní Chuilleanáin, Interview.
[102] *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 1 Mar. 1974.
[103] Doreen Wallace, "Ebb and flow of Irish Troubles," *Eastern Daily Press* [Norwich] 22 Feb. 1974.
[104] Kiely, *Irish Times*, 16 Feb. 1974.
[105] "The Passion and the Glory," *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 1 Mar. 1974.

Dillon's authorial opinions are echoed through her characters, as they eulogise the vision of the nationalist leaders who sympathised with the poor of their society and firmly believed in what they were doing. The romantic nationalist tone continues with descriptions of people who 'never had any doubt that they had done right', who 'knew what was ahead' and who would 'keep dignity to the end'. There is, presumably an unintended irony in her description of those fighting the rule of monarchy, as having 'died like kings'.[112] In judging the Easter Rising to be 'a resounding success',[113] Dillon suggests that credit should be accorded to its leaders for their 'vision and staying power'.[114] There is a strong element of memory, with the characters' deep awareness of the past and its influence on their future. This is conveyed in the question posed by Molly, reflecting not only on her own misdeeds but also on those of the country in general. She wonders about old age and poses the question: 'Will we still be thinking and remembering and shivering with horror as we are now?' An earlier comment in the book provides the answer in the declaration: 'This is something Ireland will never forget'.[115]

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[106] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 20.
[107] The use of the name Gould may have been as a tribute to Eileen O'Faoláin, whose maiden name was Gould and who was a writer greatly admired by Dillon.
[108] Dillon, 33253, "Drafts Blood Relations".
[109] Dillon, 33253, "Drafts Blood Relations".
[110] Cahalan 192.
[111] "Woman's Place," *Evening Press*, 15 Feb. 1974.
[112] Dillon, *Blood* 88.
[113] Hanly, Interview, RTÉ.
[114] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 17.

In *Blood Relations*, as in its prequel, fascinating and detailed descriptions are obviously prompted by family lore. A casual reference to the capture of a university professor may be an allusion to Dillon's father, on whose descriptions of prison life she may have depended for some sequences in the book.[116] Her knowledge that surplus Boer War ribbon was used after the Rising to make lapel badges shows attention to detail and access to first-hand information.[117] These incidental facts are interesting and enlightening but Dillon extends her narrative with much broader historical accounts that amplify the difficulties of maintaining the pace of the narrative in merging fact with fiction. For example, in the guise of a conversational exchange but with the intention of educating her readers, she gives a three-page account of Ireland's colonial experience.[118] Interestingly, a lengthy chapter in the first edition of the book, describing the escape of de Valera from Lincoln Gaol, is omitted from at least one subsequent edition.[119] While no definite reason for this omission has been ascertained, Dillon later admitted that the novel was too long and would have benefited from being reduced.[120] There may have been an effort to limit the amount of historical detail not directly related to the story, or it may have been in keeping with Dillon's dislike of portraying actual historical figures in a fictional way, as alluded to in the discussion of *Across the Bitter Sea.*

Dillon's problem in presenting public personalities was even more acute in *Blood Relations*, since 'the main actors in the drama of Irish independence'[121] were, for the most part, family acquaintances and friends. Dillon keeps figures such as de Valera, Collins, Pearse, MacDonagh and Markievicz out of the foreground, portraying them indirectly through the eyes of her fictional characters. In doing this, she is echoing the mediated way in which she had come to know many of them, through descriptions and impressions relayed to her. Perhaps overburdened by the complexity of these characters, as with Parnell, she did not dare to depict them in her fiction. In a glaring exception, however, she includes the then IRB leader, Seán Mac Eoin (1893–1973) in the narrative but justifies this on the grounds that Mac Eoin's own character was 'so straightforward and clear' that, 'as a novelist' she was captivated by him.[122] Equally, as a nationalist she was filled with admiration, or even adulation, bolstered by her family's opinion of him.[123] She writes of him as being compassionate, someone 'who had a simple uncomplicated view of the task in hand and who saw no other choice open to him'.[124] Dillon again promotes the notion of the reluctant fighter, the civilised, learned person who feels compelled to turn to force in the interests of the country, just as the founders of the State had done. For them, like Mac Eoin, there was 'no escape from conscience'.[125] Dillon writes of Mac Eoin as the ideal personage to convey the nationalist spirit that she embraced herself: 'To me he certainly represented the spirit that eventually turned failure into success. I'd be glad to think that I conveyed this to the generation after mine with *Blood Relations*'. This is a clear declaration of Dillon's compulsive need to inform and influence her audience, by relaying the doctrine expressed by her parents, views that are key to the message of conciliation that she preaches here and elsewhere:

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[115] Dillon, *Blood* 463; 453.
[116] Dillon, *Blood* 340.
[117] Leftover Boer War tri-coloured ribbon was used after 1916 as the colours corresponded with those of the Irish flag.
[118] Dillon, *Blood* 239-241.
[119] The chapter is omitted in *Blood Relations* (London: Souvenir Press, 1993).
[120] Dillon, 33350, "Outline of *Wild Geese*".
[121] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 9.

> Hatred had no part in these reminiscences of my parents. Failures were attributed to weakness of character, or bad judgment, or lack of understanding of what was required at the time, or a conflict of principle discovered too late.

She explains that in their home, nationalism was never expressed as Anti-British feeling and that, on the contrary, 'the English were not spoken of with hatred, not even the Black and Tans, though their governments and their actions were condemned'. Indeed, she asserts that 'the honesty of the English, their loyalty to each other, their patriotism' were held up as an example.[126] With echoes of the previously mentioned superiority of an aristocracy of intellect, a character in the novel, tracing his roots to the Norman invasion, extols the contribution of these early immigrants since, in being 'more intelligent' than the Irish, they could enhance the racial gene pool. The character De Lacy justifies their positive effect on Irish life: 'We Normans were more intelligent - we integrated as soon as we could. It's good for a country to have periodic incursions of foreign blood, especially for an island country like ours'.[127] Dillon outlines the dual routes taken by Norman families, either in following the English monarchy into the Reformed Church or in staying with the Church of Rome, and explains at length the reasons for their choices.

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[122] Dillon, 33321, "Historical". Dillon had read Mac Eoin's memoir written for *The Kerryman* newspaper in the 1940s, available at: http://www.ucd.ie/archives/html/collections/maceoin-sean.html.
[123] Mac Eoin was arrested at Mullingar station in March, 1921. Dillon's parents were on the same train.
[124] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 20.
[125] Dillon, *Across* 544.

Since Dillon was of this background, the overall sentiment emerging from this book is one of enormous pride derived from such beginnings and from the notion that these families enhanced Irish society through their various contributions to it. Individual family members are also merged into the narrative. Dillon draws attention to Count Plunkett who, having been recently released from Birmingham Gaol, looked 'ill and worn and old' at the first meeting of *Dáil Éireann*. However, he apparently proclaimed with great emotion, 'This is a great day. I've wanted it all my life but I never thought it would come like this'.[128] While Dillon alludes to Joseph Mary Plunkett as a public figure, she does not give him any significant fictional role, although, in one episode she describes how a prison guard removed a ring from Plunkett's finger as he lay on the ground. Given Dillon's commitment to accuracy, this story must have had a solid basis in fact and must have been common family knowledge. In a direct parallel to the marriage of Plunkett to Grace Gifford on the night before his execution, Dillon's fictional character, Sam, due to marry his fiancée who is already pregnant by another man, is executed by the British after the Rising.[129] By consistently describing historical figures as 'actors' in national events, Dillon creates a difficulty for the reader in having to distinguish the real-life 'actors' that she knew from personal and family memory from her fictional ones.

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[126] Dillon, 33321,"Historical" 9.
[127] Dillon, *Blood* 134.
[128] Dillon, *Blood* 286.

Dillon believes that 'to hold the reader's attention is a novelist's main business' and she compliments her literary idols for their capacity to do this. Admiring Stendhal's ability to include so much history in his novels, while maintaining it in the background, Dillon quotes him as saying that 'to introduce politics into a novel was like firing off a pistol at a concert'.[130] By contrast, her own political commentary intervenes, not as a pistol shot, but as a slow-burning fuse that sizzles continuously through the whole of her historical account. Her readers are often overwhelmed by the author's righteous voice and crusading tone which are detrimental to the flow of the stories. One reviewer aptly describes *Blood Relations* as 'forceful', but subject to the reader being able to 'accept the author's deep personal commitment to her country's history and the rather contrived weaving-in of historical characters'. This practice continues in successive novels.[131]

Wild Geese (1981)

In her next novel, *Wild Geese,* Dillon moves from the more recent family memory of the events of 1916, to the eighteenth century, a period in which the Dillon family was active, both militarily and ecclesiastically, in Europe. The writer's awareness of her ancestry is evident even in the book's dedication to her second husband, Vivian Mercier, which recalls that his ancestors were fleeing from France to Ireland at the same time as hers were fleeing in the opposite direction.

The three traditional romantic love stories of this book are, as one reviewer states, 'linked uneasily with a serious historical novel' in 'a loving recreation of the past.'[132] The story initially focuses on members of the Catholic gentry - Robert Brien who was forced to leave home to study abroad and his sister Louise, sent to France to recover her dead mother's fortune - but the plot is actually more concerned with the flight of Ireland's nobility to France after the events of 1691. Among them was Dillon's actual ancestor, Arthur Dillon, who entered the service of the French King as Colonel of the Dillon Regiment. Dillon enthusiastically presents not only the credentials of her own and other notable families, but also those of her characters, notably, the Flahertys of Moycullen and the D'Arcys of Woodstock, familiar from her previous novels. Family history suffuses the story with a fine cast of Dillons making repeated cameo appearances and being inevitably portrayed in a good light. For example, Archbishop Henry Dillon of Narbonne, in a departure from Dillon's other disparaging descriptions of senior clerics, is 'a great gentleman, never known to hurt anyone or to fail in his public duty'; Arthur Dillon is described as 'a fine man' while his wife Madame Dillon is the only woman to show kindness and friendship to the young Irish girl.[133] The opulent Parisian salons, with their lavish receptions and glittering chandeliers that ignore the poverty of the masses, are a macrocosm of the lesser grandeur of the Irish Big House that belies the reality of the peasants at home.

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[129] Plunkett Dillon, *All* 234. JM Plunkett married Grace Gifford in Kilmainham Gaol the night before his execution. It was rumoured that Gifford was pregnant but later miscarried, and that Plunkett was not the father of the child. Also in Anne Clare, *Unlikely Rebels* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2011) 204–205.

[130] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 4; 3.

[131] Rev. of *Blood Relations* by Eilís Dillon, *The Yorkshire Post* [Leeds] 30 Mar. 1978.

Wild Geese, as a tale of three countries, is ambitious in the breadth of its settings in Ireland, France and America, as Dillon's Irish characters take part in the events of the wider world. While the depth of research is admirable, there is, as one critic reveals, 'enough background material for several novels' causing 'some tempting byways to be unexplored and characters to fade from view in an overcrowded scene'.[134] Extensive research is indeed evident throughout, and Dillon's bibliography for the French and American sections cited in her notes is a testament to this. She relied heavily on the memoir of her ancestor Lucy Dillon for the details of aristocratic life in Paris and for her depictions of life in America, thus providing an air of authenticity to her settings.[135] This book also provided background material on the significant French personages of the age. On more familiar territory in the accounts of Ireland, Dillon outlines the background to the devastating Penal Laws, their effects on the clergy and on the general population, the poverty of the local people and the contrasting life of the wealthy, but invariably kindly, Catholic landlords. She also manages to describe the arrival of the French fleet during the American War of Independence, its engagement in naval warfare, the difficult conditions endured by the seamen and the fictionalised interactions between actual historical characters like Arthur Dillon, La Fayette and Rochambeau.[136] While this is in keeping with her policy of including 'set pieces based on real incidents' within the narrative, the effect is disjointed as she draws the threads awkwardly together.[137] There are long, descriptive passages about education and on women in Parisian society,[138] numerous references to animals[139] and other interjectory mundane details that hinder the narrative.

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[132] Ita Mallon, "Material enough for several novels," *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 20 June 1981.
[133] Dillon, *Geese* 93; 115; 74.
[134] Ita Mallon, "Material enough for several novels," *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 20 June 1981.
[135] Henrietta-Lucy Dillon de la Tour du Pin Gouvernet, *Memoirs of Madame de la Tour du Pin: Laughing and Dancing Our Way to the Precipice,* trans. Felice Harcourt (London: Harvill Press, 1999).

Dillon, in an emulation of Emily Lawless, also returns to one of her regular themes; the emigrant's yearning for the homeland, the memory of what has been left behind and the 'unbearable longing for Ireland'.[140] Lawless, in her poetry collection, *With the Wild Geese*, published in 1902, had famously addressed the plight of the 200,000 men who left Ireland to become 'war battered dogs' and 'Fighters in every clime / Every one but our own'. For these 'high bred, honourable and reckless' fighters, as Lawless saw them, the 'sorrow of exile was always in their hearts'.[141] Dillon, like Lawless, attempts to capture 'the bitterness of their exile, their passion for fighting and their longing for their native land'.[142] In her novel, any disturbing memory of the poverty of the people at home is clouded by nostalgia for their hospitality and innate goodness, with visions of the turf smoke as a symbol of everything that was left behind, 'a civilization as old as the black rocks down by the cove'.[143] She evokes this lost landscape in a description that parallels perfectly with her previously cited childhood memory of boats on the river, the call of jackdaws on singing pine, of corncrakes and wide meadows.[144] This is sharply contrasted with life in Paris, 'a wicked, wicked city', where the character Louise is subjected to great animosity. The overarching theme is one of patriotism, with characters repeatedly declaring love for their native country and urging each other to 'remember Ireland'. It is impossible to distance Dillon from the sentiments expressed: 'You never stop thinking about Ireland', and 'It's my whole life'.[145]

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[136] Dillon, *Geese* 123-32.
[137] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 6.
[138] Dillon, *Geese* 72-3.
[139] Dillon, *Geese* 14; 16; 17; 18; 26; 34; 42; 47; 50; 56; 60; 73; 80; 84; 81; 87; 94; 97; 220; 130.
[140] Dillon, *Geese* 113.
[141] Emily Lawless, *With the Wild Geese* (London: Ibister, 1902) 12 June 2011 http://www.archive.org/stream/withwildgeese00lawliala#page/n7/mode/2up.
[142] Preface, *With the Wild Geese* xxi
[143] Dillon, *Geese* 55-56.

As in previous novels in this genre, Dillon attempts to interweave stories of love and sexual attraction into the fabric of the story. Once again, there are triangular love relationships with brief descriptions of sexual encounters that fail to ring true. With her tendency towards avoidance language, Dillon conveniently summarises the character Teresa's success at initial lovemaking: 'When one is in love everything comes naturally'.[146] While, as reviewer John Kearney points out, 'the lusher excesses of romantic fiction are kept in check', Dillon nonetheless engages in what he describes as 'Romance with a capital R', which, if she could have resisted it, might have resulted in more worthy novel.[147]

Dillon also contrives, as in other work, to include her own interests, with references to the Italian poetry that she loved, to poet Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill whose lament she had earlier translated into English, and to the use of Irish as a means of really understanding the people of the west. She returns to previously mentioned issues, for example, a distrust of women in groups, the education level suited to women, the dismissal of their views by men and their unfair treatment in marriage. The lesson that the young character Louise is given on leaving Ireland is that she must become an ambassador for her country and portray it in a good light. In order to do this she is warned: 'you'll have to know your history'.[148] Dillon, confident of her knowledge of Ireland's past, seemed determined, in her own ambassadorial manner, to continue through her historical fiction, to narrate Ireland's story, although increasingly diluting it with tinges of romantic fiction. The book that followed also sought to portray, from the perspective of a controversial cleric, an era of history blurred by romance.

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[144] Dillon, *Geese* 115.
[145] Dillon, *Geese* 92; 157.
[146] Dillon, *Geese* 86; 88.
[147] Mallon, *Sunday Independent*, 20 June 1981.
[148] Dillon, *Geese* 52.

Citizen Burke (1984)

Citizen Burke, set in post-revolutionary France and rural Ireland at the time of the Rebellion of 1798, re-introduces a real-life character that had featured in a minor way in *Wild Geese.* Little is known about the renegade Catholic priest Fr James Burke except that he was born in Ireland, educated at the Irish College in Bordeaux, and defended the College with Ysabeau against the threat of attack. He is also purported to have been 'guilty of many indiscretions' and of making many enemies.' [149]

In Dillon's novel Burke struggles not only with his vocation but also with the moral dilemmas that confront him, among them: his obsession with Louise, the young woman from *Wild Geese,* his affair with local woman Jeanne, his illegitimate child and his life as a wealthy farmer and land speculator, as they conflict with his priestly vocation. Dillon takes on a major task in providing credibility for the character but with several bishops among her ancestry, she perhaps felt an affiliation with them, a duty to explore the priestly role and a need to emphasise the part played by diligent priests in helping their impoverished communities.[150] Dillon had previously written in unpublished Irish and English drafts about the life of another cleric, the infamous Miler McGrath, Bishop of Cashel, 'a thorn in the flesh of Catholic and Protestant alike'.[151] Always particularly interested in religion, Dillon described later in life, the development of her faith. Realising that she could not remain in the 'state of naivety' of her youth, she informed herself through her reading of philosophy and theology, and through her involvement in the translation of the liturgy from Latin to English. She came to respect Christianity, not through its rules but through Christ's message as a way of life in becoming 'like a child'.[152] Kiberd's recollection, that she was quite likely to make her disapproval known to senior Churchmen when she disagreed on a point, is echoed throughout this narrative, with pointed criticisms of the pomposity of various bishops and the dissent that they caused. In *Citizen Burke*, bishops are generally looked upon with suspicion, and characters are urged 'never to look for logic from a bishop'.[153] This is in contrast to the praise that Dillon gives to the courageous local priests who organised peasant resistance during the Rebellion of 1798 and who are presented as the natural leaders of the Irish people.[154] This theme of the 'independent', kindly priest in touch with his flock, is a repeated motif within these novels and may arise from her childhood memory of nationalist priest Father Griffin, a neighbour in Galway, who was killed for his efforts.[155] Dillon's stance is in keeping with Dillon's stated convictions and Kiberd's description of her as 'ferociously critical' of senior clerics while remaining devout to basic principles of goodness.[156]

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[149] Des Ryan, "James Burke Priest and Revolutionary," *Old Limerick Journal, French Edition,* 20 May 2011 http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/james%20burke.pdf.

[150] Archbishop Oliver Plunkett and the Bishop of Narbonne.

[151] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks in Ireland" 3. See Dillon, 33276 for draft document.

[152] Hanly, Interview, RTÉ.

Attempting to expose the mindset of a very un-priestly Father Burke and aiming to provide psychological insight into the character, Dillon intermittently uses his written journal as a literary device. Intended as a stream of consciousness narrative, and indeed evoking Burke's memories, she tries to communicate the complex loyalties that Burke attaches to his womenfolk, to agrarian reform, to the Catholic Church and to Ireland. The attempt to ignite the reader's interest in Burke's infatuations, obsessions and political affiliations is unsuccessful, largely because the character is not attractive enough to evoke empathy. The diary lacks the natural ease of a document allegedly written only for Burke's own use, is over-explanatory and burdened with excessive description and references to names and places that are extraneous to the storyline. The novel, a third-person narrative, although at various times from the perspectives of either Burke or his housekeeper Rose, is further complicated by moving forward and back in time, as well as alternating between France and Ireland. Commenting on the book, Mary Leland writes: 'Some of the artifice required to control the flow of personalities and events becomes too overpowering and upsets the interplay between the book and the reader'.[157] Unconvincing love scenes further alienate the reader, and the improbable monologues of Rose, in recalling her affair with the soldier Rabaut[158], are presented in a superficial language that undermines what is meant to be a serious literary novel.[159]

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[153] Dillon, *Citizen* 216.
[154] Dillon, *Citizen* 22; 191.
[155] Dillon, *Inside* 116.
[156] Kiberd, Interview.

In a reprise of their appearance in her previous book, the Dillon ancestors re-emerge with regularity. However, in many ways, it is Dillon herself who takes a leading role, allowing her preoccupations to take precedence and intrude on the story. There are consistent reminders of Norman heritage, social class and the notion of an Irish aristocracy, as well as repeated references to Ronsard, Dante[160] and Swift[161] all of whom Dillon greatly admired. Moreover, the attraction between Burke and Jeanne is unconvincingly based on their complementary knowledge of Swift. The book suffers, probably through poor editing, from repeated phrases and references.[162] The footnotes below provide evidence of this problem. The consistent allusions to cats,[163] wine,[164] quotations from Church Latin,[165] extracts from poems and ballads,[166] and constant lists of great Irish family names, are superfluous to the story and prove distracting to the reader in trying to follow the thread of the narrative. Burke's protracted, rambling diatribes on farming result in a monotony of tone[167] prompting one to question Kiberd's assertion that *Citizen Burke* was 'taken very seriously by the intelligentsia' at the time of its publication.[168] The novel was judged favourably as 'being well above average for the genre'[169] and for the author's ability to contrast 'relationships in Ireland with somewhat similar ones in France'.[170]

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[157] Mary Leland, "Where Four Worlds Meet," *Irish Press* [Dublin] 21 July 1984.
[158] A character that Dillon discovered in the diary of Theobald Wolfe Tone, in Dillon, 33255.
[159] Dillon, *Citizen* 109.
[160] Dillon, *Citizen* 33; 77.
[161] References to Swift appear on pages: 142; 168; 169; 186; 195; 201; 204; 205; 226; 256.
[162] For example, the word 'plunge' is used three times in quick succession to describe movement: 129; 131; 133.
[163] References to cats appear on pages: 24; 35; 65; 81; 88; 82; 124; 120.
[164] There are at least twenty-eight page references to wine.
[165] Latin quotations appear on pages: 52; 73; 76; 96; 209.
[166] Poems and songs appear on pages: 46; 65; 70; 77; 106; 133; 142; 210; 233.
[167] Dillon, *Citizen* 56-7.
[168] Kiberd, Interview.
[169] Kevin Casey, "History, Mystery," *Sunday Tribune* [Dublin] 8 July 1984.
[170] *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 14 July 1984. The book also featured on RTÉ's weeklong *Booktime* programme, 20-27 Nov. 1985.

However, there were also strong criticisms, which Dillon collected in an envelope marked 'grudging reviews of *Citizen Burke*'.[171] There was some comment on Dillon's occasional lapses into twentieth-century language and on one atypical inaccuracy.[172] Leland's summary of the book is, nonetheless, revealing about Dillon's status as a writer. She admits to disappointment with this novel, since Dillon had 'reared the young of Ireland on good dependable writing in good dependable stories' and the expectation was that it should be 'easy to read'.[173] She notes that, by contrast, *Citizen Burke* requires great effort on the part of the reader to maintain interest. In approaching this book, Dillon might have benefited from Elizabeth Bowen's general observations that 'relevance crystallises meaning' and that irrelevance is a 'weakener of the novel'. Unfortunately Dillon concedes to bad habits in what Bowen aptly describes as a 'deadeningness' within the narrative so that there is 'no point to sharpen'. Nor is Dillon's dialogue intentional in forming the essential bridge that could 'bear the weight of the story' in order to allow it to advance.[174] On the contrary, Dillon's over-didactic and static dialogue proves detrimental to the progression of the storyline.

Her passion becomes visible, however, when she addresses the theme of exile, as she had in *Wild Geese*. With repeated reminders of one's duty to Ireland and the emigrant's 'unbearable longing' and connection to the native soil as 'a bond not easily understood', Dillon argues that 'you have to be Irish to understand the pull of that country'.[175] Glimpses of her very competent descriptive skills are reserved for recollections of the Irish countryside by those who were forced to leave it. Her writing comes alive in her memories of 'spring days lengthening and the cold, clear light over the fields on the bare trees', in sharp contrast to the deadening effect of her prolonged polemics on politics.[176] Significantly, Burke's words summarise his life or, more accurately, form a summary of Dillon's work: 'In a sense I never left Ireland, or I took it with me'.[177] Dillon took Ireland with her more successfully into her next historical novel, the story of a returning emigrant impelled to confront his memories of the past.

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[171] Dillon, 33255, "Citizen Burke".
[172] Queen Marie Antoinette is presented as having pre-deceased her mother, the Empress Maria Theresa.
[173] Mary Leland, "Where Four Worlds Meet," *Irish Press* [Dublin] 21 July 1984.
[174] Elizabeth Bowen, "Notes on Writing a Novel," *The Mulberry Tree, Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Virago, 1986).
[175] Dillon, *Citizen* 31; 54; 10; 113; 54.
[176] Dillon, 81.

The Interloper (1987)

In the epigraph to *The Interloper*, Dillon's final published novel for adults, she once again quotes from Yeats, on this occasion, from the poem "A Dialogue of Self and Soul":

> I am content to follow its source
> Every event in action or in thought;
> Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot![178]

The action and thought that she follows 'to the source' are those of the bitter struggle of Ireland's Civil War in which over a thousand lives were lost.[179] In a marked departure from the style of *The Bitter Glass*, Dillon revisited this traumatic episode in a more forthright way and embarked on *Cast Out Remorse*, renamed and published as *The Interloper*. This final title is more apt, in that Dillon herself was something of an interloper in tackling a thorny issue and in acting as 'an interferer, a waker-up of sleeping dogs'.[180] Her stated aim was to 'show the growth and development of Ireland in the first years of independence' and to communicate the 'diverging ideas and obsessions' of the protagonists.[181] The novel is her final effort to confront, clarify and explain the causes of a conflict that had so closely affected not only her own family but also thousands of other families and communities, creating a gulf so severe within them, that as Bill Kissane states, 'it is remarkable that they were ever reconciled'. He explains that the 'obduracy and intransigence of the leaders on both sides' led to 'personal jealousy and vengeance', which left an enduring legacy of suspicion and distrust.[182]

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[177] Dillon, *Citizen* 114; 59.
[178] WB Yeats, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," (65–68) *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) *The Works of WB Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth 1994) 198.
[179] Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 231.
[180] Dillon, *Interloper* 8.
[181] Dillon, 33256, "*The Interloper* – Proofs, Notes".

The Interloper, in an echo of the first line of O'Faoláin's novel *And Again* (1979), opens with Michael D'Arcy's confessional words: 'I've got to tell my story to someone'.[183] Dillon too feels a compulsion to tell the story, bravely deciding that it was time to confront the ghosts of that period in Irish history. Other writers had been reluctant to tackle an event that is still viewed as a greater 'formative influence on the development of the Irish state than any other factor'.[184] Dillon, however, was eager to summarise the aftershocks and the lingering animosities that filtered into, and remained in, Irish politics. The novel is entirely one of retrospection, as Dillon explores themes of memory and personal redemption articulated by the character, veteran fighter D'Arcy, as he reflects on his participation, examines his misdeeds and seeks revenge or retribution from a former comrade, Paul Dunne. In an affirmation of the previously mentioned 'talking cure', Dillon examines the concept of memory through her protagonist, stating:

> Memory is a peculiar business; it can't be entirely stifled, no more than conscience can, and it has an odd way of jabbing you when you're quite unprepared for it. It's like awakening from sleep to find a thief, or a devil in your room. Sometimes, it can be exorcised by talking it out.[185]

In the conversation that forms the basis for the novel, the characters Dunne and D'Arcy engage in 'talking it out'. Echoing Yeats's poetic dialogue of self and soul, this is the long overdue discussion about the Irish nation by two characters representing the different ways of dealing with the aftermath of the Civil War. Dunne represents 'the people who could never forget about the Civil War and partition and all of that', while D'Arcy, of Anglo-Irish extraction and a member of the Big House class, belongs to those who 'had to bury it and get on with building up the country'.[186] This latter opinion is that expressed by Dillon's father who, while remaining Anti-Treaty in his views, impressed on her that the descent into civil war had been inevitable and that the country had been 'deliberately pressed into it' by the British.[187] *The Interloper* forms a summary of Dillon's family story, of incidents remembered and people recalled. Dillon wished to justify the tenacity of some of the participants in the events of the early years of the Irish State and how the effects of some incidents lingered in the national memory. As D'Arcy recalls, 'nothing that happened later could blot out the memory of those events'.[188]

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[182] Kissane, 125; 99.

[183] Dillon, *Interloper* 7. O'Faoláin's *And Again* begins: 'I am writing this for myself. I need to remember'.

[184] Kissane, 231.

[185] Dillon, *Interloper* 203.

Dillon's writing in this story shows a marked development in style from that of her previous historical novels. Told in the first person and with a heightened awareness, the author gives valuable insight into the thought process of the protagonists and therefore a deep understanding of the period. The book centres on the concept of reflection and, indeed, the author also appears more reflective in her writing than heretofore. Her advancing age may have allowed her to identify more easily with her characters, in seeking to understand their personal past. It may also be that the passage of time allowed the author greater freedom from family influences to recount the events with honesty. The Civil War had been a live issue for debate in the Dillon household during her younger life, and she understood at first hand how lives had been affected when friends and colleagues were lost and the heartbreak that had ensued as a result. This topic, unlike the material in other work, was not relayed to her at a remove of several generations but imparted with immediacy by those who had participated. Apart from hearing her parents' stories, Dillon had also gleaned a lot of information about this period from her husband Cormac and his friends, and through them had learned a great deal about the attitudes of those who felt forced into a position of rebellion.[189] Dillon explains her close involvement with the novel: 'I put in what is really my own point of view to some extent in *The Interloper*, a certain grudging admiration for the wrong-headed Dunne who keeps his ruthless idealism going until the end'.[190]

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[186] Dillon, *Interloper* 8.
[187] Dillon, 33321, "Historical" 17.
[188] Dillon, *Interloper* 93.
[189] Dillon, 33352, "Across".

However, evidence of the unreliability of family and collective memory is exemplified by one incident narrated in the novel. A story relayed to Dillon as fact, and also strongly maintained in folk memory, is a prime example of how memory can be distorted. It forms a pivotal moment in the novel as it causes the protagonist to reject violence and feel revulsion towards his comrades. It concerns, as Dillon describes, the rejoicing by Irish rebels at 'the lingering death inflicted on a resident magistrate, buried in the sand and left to drown in the rising tide on a desolate shore'.[191] It has recently been established that this event never actually occurred but had somehow entered into popular mythology. However, it represents the type of reprisal that could have been inflicted at the time.[192]

Some weaknesses in the writing reappear, particularly in the familiar description of the romantic relationship, once again a love triangle, this time doomed to failure. While bravely attempting to describe a sensual experience from a male perspective, Dillon fails to convey adequately an intimate atmosphere, explaining instead, that modern young people would not understand the denial of sexual relationships by people in the early years of the century. However, the novel is more tightly written than her previous books, since the dialogue is more focused and the narrative less burdened with unnecessary descriptions, making it more accessible to the reader. Although the tone is at times didactic, particularly in explaining the Anglo-Irish Treaty, there is an underlying emotion in this novel that is absent in other work. For example, D'Arcy, remembering a friend who became an opponent, says: 'The worst pain for me was in the knowledge that Michael Collins was my enemy. I remember tears running down my face at the thought of him'.[193] Despite being spoken by a fictional character and mirroring the distress felt within the community at large, this sentiment could well have been spoken by Dillon's parents who had lost so many friends, among them Collins.

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[190] Dillon, 33346, Letter to Publisher, "Correspondence," 3 June 1988.
[191] Dillon, *Interloper* 35.
[192] *History Ireland*, 18.1 History Publications Ltd. (Jan/Feb 2010): 36-7.
[193] Dillon, *Interloper* 31; 31; 87; 73; 127.

In *The Interloper*, Dillon reverts to familiar themes: the benefits of being able to speak the Irish language, the customs of the local people, their uplifting dancing and song as a panacea to their ills, class difference and the atmosphere of the Big House. D'Arcy, as described, could be viewed as a Dillon or a Plunkett, being of Norman origins, belonging to the gentry, and having nationalist affiliations and a strong sense of responsibility to his country. Through him, Dillon continues to confront some of the theological issues that she had begun to address in *Citizen Burke*, taking a Jesuitical standpoint on Church rules and regulations which confirmed many of her own views, as outlined by Kiberd.[194] But while the novel provides an overview of the convictions that Dillon held throughout her life, it was also a brave attempt to articulate Ireland's growing maturity in relation to the Civil War and was a means of countering some of the vestiges of the postcolonial amnesia that remained. It was a genuine confrontation by Dillon of Ireland's past in the 'bitter glass' of retrospection and a fulfilment of her need to return to this period of history that she had first treated more obliquely in her novel of that name, almost thirty years before. However, Dillon's espousal of the historical narrative was not over and, in 1988, she submitted a further novel, *The Crown of a Stranger*, dealing with ex-IRA men who, embittered after the Civil War, fought with the Irish Brigade in Spain in the 1930s and 40s. The novel was rejected by her British publishers as they were 'nervous of the IRA' in their modern incarnation and felt that the subject matter would not be appreciated by a British audience.[195] Perhaps this refusal, along with her restless search for the ideal genre, encouraged Dillon to change direction again, back to the form of writing that in her later years she proclaimed was her forte, the literary or psychological novels she had written earlier in her career.[196]

Conclusion

In ambitiously covering a broad span of Irish history, Dillon displays definite literary skill, particularly in her portrayal of the ambience of life in large houses, with images of gracious living and fading affluence as well as authentic detail of the immediate environment. She keeps alive the image of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in the guise of the good landlord who is sympathetic towards his tenants and genuine in his intentions, within a community that was losing relevance in the developing Ireland. In doing so, Dillon demonstrates a considerable knowledge of history and an indefatigable capacity for research. However, her most admirable talent remains in her ability to describe, with great affection, the natural surroundings she remembers from her youth, born out of a desire to share the beauty of Ireland's landscape with her readers.

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[194] Dillon, *Interloper* 19; 128; 170.
[195] Dillon, 33346, Letter, "Correspondence," 23 May 1988.
[196] Hanly, Interview, RTÉ.

Dillon was criticised for an approach that became somewhat formulaic, based on the procedure of choosing a turbulent time in history, isolating some characters, involving them in a series of events, real and invented, and introducing a love story.[197] While these make fine elements for romantic fiction with a historical background, Dillon wished to engage simultaneously in what she saw as serious historiography. Believing that a didactic purpose was 'the kiss of death' for a novelist, Dillon realised that her novels 'do indeed help to educate the youth of the nation'. She states that she would have deemed her work a failure without the approval of 'highly educated, sophisticated men and women, some of them historians', whose opinion she valued. Questioned about the 'Harlequin, romance styled covers' on her American paperbacks, she acknowledges the fashion for 'a vulgar standard of book jacket' and the tendency to try 'to take in all audiences with a single book'. She contrasts this to the English paperback editions, which were 'not as offensive', and also to her own choice of paintings by Jack B Yeats for the hardback dust cover images.[198] The contrasting presentations of the various editions elucidate the difficulties that Dillon experienced in fulfilling her desire to be critically acclaimed, while satisfying the publishers' marketing ambitions. Similarly, the inevitable blurring of the two functions of historian and storyteller leads to a dilution of both roles and a tendency to fall into the gap between them. Pulitzer Prize winner, Jeff Shaara, clarifies the inherent contradictions for the writer of historical fiction:

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[197] Kevin Casey, "History Mystery," *Sunday Tribune* [Dublin] 8 July 1984.
[198] Dillon, Letter, 11 May 1981, qted in Cahalan 178.

> It is the job of the historian to tell us *what* happened, to provide the dates and places and numbers, all the necessary ingredients of textbooks. It is the job of the storyteller to bring out the thoughts, the words, the souls of these fascinating characters, to tell us *why* they should be remembered and respected and even enjoyed.[199]

Dillon very capably describes what happened and also expresses the motives of her characters, but is hesitant in revealing their souls and is too cautious to bare them to the world for critical attention. In a revealing letter to German writer, Heinrich Boll, who translated some of her children's books, she demonstrates her understanding of the difficulties that she faced:

> The pitfalls are frightening as we know. Keeping the right distance while investigating tragic emotional and personal difficulties is the constant problem of all novelists. When you add the dimension of history or politics it can become a nightmare and the novel is in danger of becoming a tract.[200]

The dichotomy of appeal is magnified in these works and Dillon's over-cautious distancing of her emotions from these narratives is problematic for the reader. One reviewer, writing about *Across the Bitter Sea*, articulates a difficulty that extends to most of Dillon's historical novels:

> Because the personal element is continually hauled back to its public purpose of amplifying history, there is a curiously flat and repetitious rhythm to the book with the disappointing result that one feels no nearer the heart of the matter after 500 odd pages of honest effort by both reader and writer.[201]

Dillon had underlined the sincerity of her efforts, stating: 'love, death and politics have become the most clichéd subjects in literature, but to me they're subjects that can only be dealt with in terms of the most naked honesty'.[202] This honesty is laudable and points to a genuine attempt to narrate Ireland's history but is at the expense of emotional investment. Dillon had often commented that the study of music was of great benefit in developing her technique in writing, since it could be approached in a similar way by practising it daily in order to improve.[203] She believed that in the process of writing, as in playing music, 'it is possible to see how clearly the soul of the performer is displayed'.[204] Yet, while she had attained a proficiency in writing, the enormous personal emotion, invested by great musicians into their playing, is generally absent in Dillon's literature. Indeed, she promoted the idea of objectivity, claiming benefit from being able to 'distance' herself from her subjects and thus advised new writers: 'You may weep and moan over your stories, you may suffer together with your characters, but it should be done in such a way that the reader does not detect it. The more objective, the stronger the impression!'[205] The problem is that, in shying away from subjectivity, Dillon also shies away from emotion, substituting it instead with extensive descriptive detail. A comment in *Blood Relations* describes people who 'had bamboozled themselves with history and songs and poetry'.[206] It is impossible while reading some of Dillon's novels not to feel similarly 'bamboozled' by her inclusion of selected topics, literary allusions and factual irrelevancies.

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[199] Jeff Shaara, *The Last Full Measure* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998) vii; viii.
[200] Dillon, Letter to Heinrich Boll, N.d in DFA, Box 1.
[201] Jacky Gillott, *The Times* [London] 21 Feb. 1974.
[202] "Woman's Place," *Evening Press*, 15 Feb. 1974.

In clinging to memory and history in her work, Dillon found safety in the fixed, secure, traditional life of the west and the immutable past. With a tendency towards Renan's 'cult of ancestry', Dillon expresses the belief that the test of a true story is that 'it has been experienced by an ancestor and handed down with a sense of importance'.[207] Privileged to have received so many stories, all told with a sense of their importance, Dillon was steeped in family memory, rooted in her past and bound by duty to remind her readers of it. She justifies her obsessive approach to telling the family story and the story of Ireland by placing the blame firmly on the lure of country itself, couched in the traditional and clichéd metaphor of Ireland as an enticing female. As one of her characters puts it: 'The pull of this country is as mysterious as the love of a woman'.[208] It was the Ireland of the past that had this firm grip on her attention and she chose to focus exclusively on it, instead of on the contemporary world around her. However nationalistic in tone they were, these novels demonstrated Dillon's ability to rescue and maintain history, to provide it with popular appeal and while commemorating it, help to erase painful memories. She also managed to address disturbing events and overcome some of the silence attached to them, thereby allowing them to enter the collective consciousness.

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[203] "Emotions of a young writer," Rev. of Summer Course for Librarians, *Irish Times* [Dublin] 12 July 1962.
[204] Dillon, 33334, "Corvo" 2.
[205] Dillon, 33329, "O Faoláin" 39.
[206] Dillon, *Blood* 40.
[207] Dillon, 33346, "Folk Memory" 37.

However, the texts discussed here and in previous chapters were not Dillon's sole contribution to Ireland's literary and artistic life, nor were they her only demonstration of patriotism or of her promotion of Ireland in a favourable light. Her influence extends into the wider field of the arts in general, into which she invested considerable energy and enthusiasm. This added dimension to Eilís Dillon's career as part of her enduring legacy will be discussed in Chapter Six.

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[208] Dillon, *Across* 17.

Chapter Six

Eilís Dillon Remembered

Introduction

Intent on commemoration, Dillon was extremely conscious of public memory, of the legacy of Irish writers in general, and of Swift's in particular, with his ability to speak across the gulf of time to successive generations.[1] To produce work that is 'universally understandable, from nation to nation and from century to century' was, in Dillon's view, 'the mark of genius'.[2] Like Yeats, who had an obsessive interest in Swift's haunting presence,[3] Dillon also reflected on his epitaph, and pondered on her own possible legacy in the light of his words: *Go forth, Voyager, and copy, if you can, / this vigorous (to the best of his ability) Champion of Liberty.* She mused: 'I wonder how many of us would have the nerve to assess our life's work like that, and dare anyone else to do better'.[4] While Dillon may not have had the courage required to do so, this chapter, on her behalf, speculates on the current impact of her work and the possible influence that she may exert into the future. It outlines her committed contribution to literary and artistic initiatives and the ways in which she can be regarded as a significant literary presence. It also contemplates Dillon's lost legacy, a consequence of personal and other factors that inhibited her literary output, which was also brought short by her untimely death.

Aware of the family tradition of combining patriotism with public duty, Dillon indicated a strong desire to influence future generations. Inspired by the acts of her forebears, she too, wished to leave her mark not only on the current generation of readers but also on those that would follow. Viewing the writer's ideal legacy as being the ability 'to communicate across the abyss of time and space the feelings that stirred him at the moment of writing', Dillon wanted her literature to reflect the past while also influencing and shaping the future. In referring to

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[1] Swift died on 19 Oct. 1745 and is buried in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, where his epitaph can be read in full.
[2] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 20.
[3] James Lovic Allen, "Imitate him if you dare: Relationships between the epitaphs of Swift and Yeats," *Studies, An Irish Quarterly Review,* 70, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus (Summer/Autumn 1981): 278/9, 30 Apr. 2011 http://www.jstor.org/pss/30090353.
[4] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 24.

English writer, Frederick Baron Corvo, she identifies a closeness to the artist's words, even at a remove of time, 'a kind of telepathy which extends quite readily from the time when he wrote them, more than fifty years ago, to this present age'.[5] Dillon, in turn, wished to make that connection.

Placing great emphasis on the role of the writer in society and the duties and responsibilities attached to it, Dillon was ambitious in her desire to serve the community at large and expended great energy in meeting her self-imposed standards. Her writings indicate a desire to be critically acclaimed; to promote Ireland abroad; to act as a patron of the arts; to encourage new writers; to have her work endure within Ireland's distinguished literary tradition, and to be remembered for her achievements. Her personal expectations for the heritage she would endow are contrasted here with the status actually accorded to her as a writer, the place she earned in individual memory and in the official and collective memories of the literary community and of the Irish nation. While, throughout her career, Dillon sought enduring recognition through her committed application to writing and experimentation with genres, public honours proved elusive for some time.

She is, however, well remembered and highly regarded by friends, family and commentators, some of whom have contributed to this study and provide insights into her professional life and times. Interviews conducted with her daughter, Eiléan, her son, Cormac and with friends and colleagues - children's literature critic Robert Dunbar; academic Declan Kiberd; publisher Michael O'Brien and author Jack Harte of the Irish Writers' Centre - have all helped to elucidate Dillon's contribution to literature and the arts.

Critical Forces

Personal inhibitions toward criticism had led to a sense of extreme caution at the beginning of Dillon's career and were instrumental in her decision to confine herself to children's literature and to certain other genres that seemed 'harmless' occupations for a young mother. She recalls that the conservatism of the time meant that association with writers like O'Connor and O'Faoláin was deemed almost as 'an occasion of sin', and although the latter made 'delightful fun of it', 'he also revealed the darker side, the meanness and oppression of spirit' that prevailed.[6] Literary repression, intensified by narrow government policies that aimed at protecting Ireland both from outside influences and from liberal tendencies within its own boundaries, had a particular impact on writers of Dillon's generation.[7] Writing about censorship during the 1950s, Dillon recollects that 'books were being banned wholesale until almost the whole corpus of world literature was represented on that list'. She comments that 'some faint-hearted people were put off writing altogether by the spectacle of what became of these "purveyors of filth", as novelists were commonly described at Sunday Mass and in the conservative papers'. Citing her parents' opinions as representative of those held by the more broad-minded founders of the State, she describes their view of censorship 'as a typical piece of post-revolution misplaced idealism – the wish to create the perfect world beyond reproach, thereby justifying the revolution further'.[8] The result of the over-zealous approach of ideologues was that most of Ireland's leading novelists, as Fallon states, 'suffered both financial loss and personal opprobrium through it'.[9]

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[5] Dillon, 33334, "Frederick Baron Corvo" 2; 3. Corvo was the pseudonym of Frederick William Rolfe (1860-1913).

Despite her excoriation of the absurdity of censorship, Dillon was still unable to countenance having her name added to the cohort of banned writers or to be, as a consequence, remembered in Ireland and internationally as having belonged to it. She remained extremely conscious of public perception but eager to prove herself as a professional writer, while carefully choosing genres that kept her out of the full glare of the critical limelight. However, when living in Rome during the 1960s, she remained in touch with developments at home and contributed on occasion to debate in the letters' pages of the Irish newspapers.[10]

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[6] Dillon, 33319, "A Writer in Cork" 5; 8; 9; 9; 5; 6.

[7] John Banville, "Memory and Forgetting: The Ireland of de Valera and O'Faoláin," *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea & Carmel Quinlan (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004) 27.

[8] Dillon, 33329, "Seán O'Faoláin and the Young Writer" 41; 41; 41–2.

[9] Brian Fallon, "Reflecting on Ireland in the 1950s," *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr Shea & Carmel Quinlan (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004) 34.

[10] Dillon, "Letters to the Editor," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 28 Dec. 1968.

Living abroad provided her with the confidence to engage from a distance with the Irish critics whom she had always feared. For example, an *Irish Times* reviewer had accused her of using her novel, *Bold John Henebry*, to hit back at criticisms of her play, *A Page of History*, causing Dillon to respond to this injustice. Wishing to set the record straight and 'in the interests of truth' as she saw it, Dillon, in a letter to the newspaper, clarified that the book had been written long before the play was performed and denied any putative connection. She also refuted the assertion that her play was 'mauled by the critics', claiming that, on the contrary, the *Irish Times* writer was alone in his dislike of the play and that other reviews had been 'more than civil'.[11] While professing to having written the letter without 'any spirit of personal rancour', a barbed comment about it being 'difficult to put across one's view of Ireland in Ireland' was aimed specifically at Irish critics. In a further gibe at the lack of appreciation of her work at home, she adds that 'the hated Saxon seems to like this book quite well'.[12]

Dillon writes of the added confidence she gained during her many visits to America and contrasts the 'air of optimism' she encountered there with the negative atmosphere of home: 'I learned to put my goods in the shop window, never to minimise my own achievements and to put up a fight for what I wanted. If I had done any of those things in Ireland I would have been shot down at once'.[13] As Dillon achieved greater success and grew in self-belief, her views appeared to mellow and she could see the benefits attached to critical attention. Accepting that 'everyone in Ireland feels competent to criticise', she came to believe that criticism could be used to advantage, since with 'so many experts around', there was little fear that the writer would 'wither up for lack of attention'. She explains that this interest in the writer, however 'savage', produced a climate in which the arts could flourish, whereas complacency acted as 'the enemy of perfection'.[14] She came to appreciate that even strong comment by one's peers should be welcomed,

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Possibly remembering her schooling in Connemara, she criticised the 'woolly thinking – or even fear' that prevailed in Ireland on the issue of corporal punishment, in comparison to the Italian system of 'discussion and persuasion.'

[11] Dillon had received very favourable comment in *The Irish Press*, 24 Nov. 1964 which praised the work as 'one of the best pieces of writing to emerge out of the Abbey for a considerable time.'

[12] Dillon, "Letters to the Editor," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 15 June 1965, 12.

[13] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 29.

[14] Dillon, 33322, "Poetic" 35.

believing that 'this sharpens our wits and stimulates us to improve our technique and clarify our own principles'.[15] In critiquing the work of other writers, she enjoyed writing newspaper reviews as a means of airing or reiterating some of her own preoccupations such as, the merging of the academic and artistic minds and the quality of the 'daily texture of Irish life'.[16] Despite an apparent relaxation of attitude, those who knew her later in life attest to Dillon's enduring dislike of critical comment. Dunbar remarks that 'she wanted very much the favour and approval of her peers and the critics',[17] while O'Brien remembers her as 'very edgy and very sensitive', stating bluntly that 'she did not like criticism!'[18]

It was typical, however, of Dillon's inherited sense of obligation that, where she perceived injustice in unfair criticism, she sought to do something about it for the sake of other writers. Having belatedly recognised the importance of literary criticism and having gained experience as a reviewer herself, Dillon, in the late 1980s, formulated a code of practice for critics that laid down basic conventions and matters of journalistic etiquette. Although it received little recognition or support from newspapers at the time,[19] it was an innovative document and remains today the policy of the Irish Writers' Union and can be viewed on the website of that organisation.[20] It is fitting that Dillon should, as part of her legacy, devise a code that would aim to improve the attitudes and ethics of a profession that she distrusted, allowing her to become a possible influential presence in their work into the future.

Literary Ambassador

The improving economic and cultural environment of the 1960s allowed Dillon to become part of, what Fallon terms, 'a miniature Celtic Renaissance'. He explains that a number of cultural and creative initiatives were undertaken in many artistic fields, amid a 'surprising pulse of vitality and creativity'[21] that rippled under the surface as Ireland began to 'belatedly participate in the world economic boom'.[22] The broad vision for Ireland held by Taoiseach Seán Lemass corresponded perfectly with views expressed as early as 1900, that Ireland and its people should become 'not only prosperous and peaceful, but of some account to the world as well'.[23] This idea that 'the acquisition of cultural capital is closely linked to the acquisition of other forms of capital, particularly economic',[24] still resonates among the arts community in seeking once more to be 'of consequence' to the world.[25] Dillon recognised her own responsibility in working to this end. Jack Harte comments on her motivation to work in the national interest noting: 'With that generation there was a certain amount of patriotism. The country needed a good image and writing was a thing that gave it a good image everywhere around the world'.[26]

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[15] Dillon, 33328, "Coming Home to Dublin" 1.
[16] *Los Angeles Times*, 9 Feb. 1986.
[17] Dunbar, Interview.
[18] O'Brien, Interview.
[19] Harte, Interview.
[20] Irish Writers' Union, http://www.ireland-writers.com/review.htm.
[21] Fallon, *An Age of Innocence* 253; 271.

Although always of the viewpoint that the place for any Irish writer was at home, Dillon saw mutual links with other cultures as essential throughout history. In a lecture entitled "Forty Years of Freedom", Dillon reflects on the national character during the 1960s, an era of renewed energy and freedom. She even implicates Ireland's climate in helping 'to produce an adventurous cast of mind in the whole nation', with its 'dramatic cloud formations that lift up the imagination, with strongly coloured sunsets, always different, and subtly suggesting the existence of other worlds waiting to be examined'. She contends that Ireland's geographic position no longer leads to the 'insularity, obscurantism [and] rigidity of custom' of earlier times but provides an opportunity for the Irish 'to observe trends in Europe before being caught up in them', in order 'to learn from the mistakes of other nations'. Always alert to Ireland's international status, Dillon compliments the new generation of legislators for their awareness of the 'necessity of keeping in touch with European and American thought, before taking action'. She also writes with pride of Ireland's new industries and of the production of quality goods for export. Using a phrase that was popular at the time to compare the country's growing prosperity to that of more developed countries, she asserts: 'This is America at home'.[27]

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[22] Horgan, *Seán Lemass* 138.

[23] DP Moran, "The Philosophy of Irish Ireland," *New Ireland Review 1898-1900* [1. Sept. 1900] Ed. Patrick Maume (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006) 124.

[24] Horgan 9. Horgan asserts that Lemass was an admirer of DP Moran.

[25] Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland, Same Difference* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008) 31.

[26] Harte, Interview.

This sense of pride in her country led Dillon to take on a self-appointed role as a sort of cultural ambassador for Ireland, and she completed several extensive lecture tours of the United States during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. While publicising her books abroad she also, through her lectures on a range of topics, promoted a positive image of Ireland. With enormous respect for Irish literary heritage, she spoke about Beckett, Joyce, Yeats, Stephens and Swift, and at the same time presented Ireland as culturally enriched, due to its ancient and continuing traditions of learning and literature. In addition, through evocative descriptions of the Irish countryside, she prompted an awareness of the beauty of Ireland's landscape, portraying the country as unique and enticing. In these opinionated and informative lectures, Dillon verbally projected a mirror image of the Ireland of her books, a disappearing world that appealed to the Irish-American audiences of the 1960s and 70s that she sought to educate and who, as Dunbar states, 'due to sentimentality, viewed her work very favourably'.[28] Interestingly, Lady Gregory, with a comparable sense of national duty, had fulfilled a similar function in her visits abroad. Judith Hill describes that it was not until Gregory travelled to America and responded to the demand for lectures there, that she 'discovered a purpose built role and a style to suit'.[29] Dillon's lecture notes are a testament to the patriotic vigour with which she also promoted Ireland abroad. She performed a similar promotional role with her book *Inside Ireland*, which, in her synopsis, she had proposed would be 'very personal' and would be in spirit 'uncompromisingly Irish'. It would include Irish folklore and proverbs as well as her family story. Most importantly, the country's history, 'one of the most important elements of the Irish mentality', would be central to this work. Dillon's proposal that appealing representations of Irish landscape and lifestyle should accompany the text were unfortunately not realised, and the photographs appear carelessly chosen and do little to enhance what is otherwise a fine publication. In a comment that sums up her noble ambitions for her country, Dillon wished that the book would communicate her own 'wide-eyed belief in the native wit of the present Irish nation to make a texture of life suitable for itself, always leaving room for lots of criticism and complaint and savage indignation and raucous intemperate laughter'.[30]

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[27] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 1; 2; 3; 29.

[28] Dunbar, Interview.

[29] Judith Hill, *Lady Gregory, An Irish Life* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011) 179.

Responsibility of the Writer

These overt efforts at publicising Ireland form an important part of Dillon's legacy at a time when Ireland, from the 1960s onwards, needed to establish its place in a modern world. Dillon saw this work as part of her professional responsibility as a writer. Moreover, she believed that leadership, self-sacrifice and professional tenacity were essential qualities expected of the true artist. Like O'Faoláin, who had advised that young writers 'should forget their genius and concentrate on the art of life and living and on their craft', Dillon recognised the value of industry in contrast to the gift of inspiration.[31] She commented on other capable but less productive writers of her generation:

> Ireland was full of talented writers, their heads bursting with unwritten books, their critical faculties on the alert to assess the achievements of their friends and acquaintances. Their wit was devastating [...] I had the greatest respect for their talents but none for their industry.[32]

Unlike those nameless others, Dillon embraced the role of professional writer with great determination and discipline, and committed herself to a rigorous writing routine that in time led to her prolific output. From the teaching and campaigning of O'Faoláin, she learned that she was part of 'a dangerous but honourable profession, where the sky was the limit, where courage was essential and where, in the last analysis, one's own judgment would be the only criterion'. Dillon writes that she and others had learned, 'to work incessantly and indefatigably without hope or recognition, nor indeed hankering after it, except in so far as it might prove that we were doing a good job'.[33] Although Dillon undoubtedly did seek recognition, she was also the epitome of perseverance in working consistently, in experimenting with genre, in seeking to improve despite setbacks, and in always striving to excel as a professional writer. Her determined attitude can be summed up in her comment printed as one of the *Sunday Independent* "Quotes of the Week": 'Doctors don't get doctor's block, lawyers don't get lawyer's block. I don't allow myself to get writer's block'.[34] Dillon's resolve to expand on her achievement is exemplified in her attempts to have her work recognised both at home and internationally. Possibly hoping for a similar success to that of James Plunkett with his televised version of *Strumpet City*, Dillon, with great determination co-authored with Anthony C. Bartley a screenplay of her novel *Blood Relations* and submitted it as a six part series for television,[35] which, despite her efforts, did not come to fruition.[36]

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[30] Dillon, 33277, "Inside Ireland".

[31] O'Faoláin, "The New Criticism" *The Bell* XVIII, Apr. 1952-Sept. 1953.

[32] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 23.

In an overstated comparison, Dillon, however, also expected 'an overwhelming sense of responsibility'[37] on the part of the writer such as that demonstrated by the poets of 1916 who had, in a dutiful way, 'represented the soul of Ireland with the instinctive insight of artists'. She explained that their 'generosity and charity' meant that they could not stand idly by and observe the sufferings of the Irish people without doing something about it. Similarly, she asserted that writers, being central to the ongoing task of raising the national morale, could present the arts as 'a yardstick' of the progress of the country as a whole, and instil in the community a crucial sense of pride and confidence.[38] The link with 1916 introduces an exaggerated notion of self-sacrifice and personal suffering, in this case, for one's art. Dillon suggested that the writer, born with 'an uncomfortable gift', willingly goes through 'all kinds of agonies and despairs', since the alternative of giving up one's art would be the greatest sacrifice of all.[39]

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[33] Dillon, 33329, "Seán O'Faoláin and the Young Writer" 43.

[34] "Quotes of the Week," *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 2 Aug. 1992.

[35] Dillon, 33253, "*Blood Relations*." Dillon collaborated with Anthony C. Bartley on the screenplay, dated, 12 Apr. 1989.

[36] Dillon, 33253, "*Blood Relations*." A letter from producer Morgan O' Sullivan of Tara Productions Ireland Ltd. indicates that he had read and enjoyed the manuscript, and hoped to secure funding for the project.

[37] Dillon, 33324, "Landmarks" 22.

[38] Dillon, 33323, "Poets" 40; 31; 24; 31.

[39] "Emotions of a Young Writer," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 12 July 1962.

Ostensibly writing about Corvo but simultaneously providing personal insight, she described 'the burning urge' felt by every artist 'which must be satisfied in some measure, or relinquished only at a terrible cost to its owner'. Justifying her own tenacious and persistent approach from an early age, she wrote that the artist is obsessive by nature about his art, in that 'everything must serve it, everything is bent towards it'. She contended that, 'from the moment he is born and long before the years of consciousness', he has been striving towards satisfying this urge.[40] These views highlight Dillon's undoubted belief in the importance of the writer in the national context. In demonstrating diligence, she was calling for a greater respect and a higher status to be accorded to writers who, in working on their craft, suffer in the pursuit of excellence. With a desire to belong to an admired literary elite, Dillon often referred to the esteem in which the *file* or poet was traditionally held in Ireland, and sought, through her cultural involvements, to raise the prestige of writing as a profession. In line with family opinion, Dillon declared that the writer's duty extended into the wider artistic community and this view prompted her extensive involvement in many areas of the arts.

Contribution to the Arts

Although claiming to be stifled in the parochial atmosphere of Cork, she and her husband Cormac had played an active role in the promotion of the arts in that city. Perhaps encouraged by her grandfather's interest in Dante, they were instrumental in founding a branch of the *Società Dante Alighieri*, aimed at the diffusion of Italian language and culture.[41] They also, with echoes of the cultural *salon* of an earlier era, regularly entertained visiting musicians who came from Rome to perform and, through their connections with composer Professor Aloys Fleischmann, some *Raidió Éireann* quartet concerts were performed in the drawing room of the Warden's House where they lived. Sculptor Séamus Murphy was a close friend whose home became 'a kind of refuge', where conversation was 'interesting and constructive'. Dillon recalls that film-maker, Louis Marcus, described it as a kind of university or rather 'a hedge school where one learned a mish mash of interesting things'.[42] Dillon's belief that the artist should be appreciated in his own country was evident even at this stage. In 1961, she and Fleishmann wrote to the Department of the Taoiseach advocating the introduction of a civil list as a means of honouring notable Irish artists.[43] It was not until many years later that *Aosdána*[44] was founded. Dillon was also nominated by the government to be a member of the Arts Council, which provided opportunities for emerging artists and she played a part in the development of the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annamakerrig, causing her to wonder if her future lay in being a patron of the arts in a full-time capacity.[45]

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[40] Dillon, 33334, "Corvo" 6.

[41] Count Plunkett had organised the sexcentenary anniversary celebrations in 1921.

Later, as an established author, she became confident enough of her influential position to take part in a quiet revolution of the arts and played a central role in a number of organisations that promoted artistic and literary change. Her aim as chairperson of the Irish Writers' Union was 'to professionalise writing and to establish opportunities for writers to earn a living as writers, or in fairly closely related areas' at a time when, as Harte asserts, public regard for their craft was low and they were generally poorly represented. Reacting to injustice in the late 1980s when the Censorship Board, 'which had gone dormant since the 1960s', reasserted itself, Dillon became involved in defending writers whose books were banned. Harte remembers her enthusiasm for this cause, describing her as 'feisty', 'appreciative of radical thought' and happy to challenge 'pre-conceived notions' in the interest of the writing community.[46] Even more significantly, Dillon was also a founding member of the Irish Children's Book Trust in 1989, and later instigated a merger with the Children's Literature Association of Ireland, founded three years before. The union of these two major forces within children's literature incorporated the best of both associations when it finally emerged under the name Children's Books Ireland in 1996. The survival into the present of this unified, vibrant and innovative organisation, whose aim is to ensure that books remain at the centre of children's lives, can be attributed in some part to Dillon's foresight.[47]

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[42] Dillon, 33320, "Able and Willing" 13.

[43] Dillon, 33338, "Press Cuttings 1950–1990." Original Letter 19 Mar. 1963 in the Fleischmann Collection, Cork University Archives: 9860 s9422E/63.

[44] *Aosdána* is an affiliation of Creative Artists in Ireland, founded in 1981.

[45] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 40.

[46] Harte, Interview.

Guided by Swift and the 'savage indignation' that stirred him all his life, Dillon decided to 'take heart at this proof that one's fires need not cool as one grows older'.[48] With an undimmed enthusiasm and interest in international developments, she continued to participate in promotional events at home and abroad, visiting Kyoto, Moscow, Budapest and Barcelona during her final years. In a lecture delivered in 1991 on returning to Dublin after some years spent in California, Dillon once again reflects on the changes of the previous thirty years in Ireland.[49] In contrast to the image of inertia that had previously pertained, she expresses amazement at Ireland's social, cultural and environmental achievements, as well as a remarkable attitudinal change. In particular, she ascribes great significance to the income tax exemption scheme for artists in Ireland that had been introduced in 1969.[50] With great pride in the new industriousness of Irish writers, and highlighting a typical link with Yeats, she writes:

> The system is unique in the world, since there are absolutely no strings attached [...] Pessimists who said the artists would become lazy have been confounded: in fact production has increased enormously and more importantly the prestige of artists has risen to a level it hadn't enjoyed since the days when the poet stood next in rank to the king. Yeats would have enjoyed that. He was as sure as I am that the best place for an Irish writer is at home.[51]

This continued recognition of the artist's role represented, for Dillon, a vindication of her long-held views on the importance of the artist in society and a fulfilment of her aspirations for Ireland's writers.

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[47] Children's Books Ireland, http://www.childrensbooksireland.ie/.

[48] Dillon, 33324, "Corvo" 38.

[49] Dillon had also similarly reflected in the 1960s in a lecture "Forty Years of Freedom." Dillon,

[50] The scheme was introduced by Charles Haughey, later Taoiseach, but then as Minister for Finance.

[51] Dillon, 33328, "Coming Home to Dublin" 4.

Contribution to Literature

Despite the fact that her popularity as an author waned, Dillon's contribution to children's literature is still acknowledged. O'Brien, while critical of the content of her children's books, confirms that her work could be prized 'almost like a classic literature' and was worth publishing on that basis. He also asserts that the books were still successful for a period in the 1980s due to a nostalgic atmosphere that prevailed and the fact 'there were a lot of people who appreciated the old fashioned traditional way'. He maintains that the sudden drop in Dillon's sales soon afterwards can be attributed to the publication of a greater number of new titles, to the country's readiness for change and to the need for a contemporary voice. It may also have been related to publicity strategies, with newer authors being promoted more aggressively to capture a growing market.

Nonetheless, O'Brien accepts Dillon's 'immense contribution', stating that 'she definitely was a catalyst' who 'provided authentic children's literature where almost nothing existed before'.[52] She had championed the cause of literature for young people while raising expectations of excellence within the genre.[53] Kiberd concurs with this assessment of Dillon's influence: 'If today there are whole sections in our bookshops devoted to Irish children's literature, that is due in great part to her pioneering contribution, which helped to raise the prestige of this once-neglected area of literary endeavour'.[54] Journalist Eoghan Corry comments that Dillon's death in 1994 marked the end of an era during which she had not only 'kept the inkwell of Irish children's writing brimming through some pretty unproductive decades', but she also '*was* that inkwell, an inspiration to other children's writers struggling to make an impact'.[55] Commentator, Celia Keenan, recognises Dillon as 'one of the most important Irish writers for children in the second half of the twentieth century' and as a writer who engaged in 'the task of inventing Ireland for children' while simultaneously demonstrating a profound interest in both national and international concerns.[56] Nancy Watson concurs with this judgement of Dillon as a 'foundational' writer, 'whose engagement with the politics of Irish life' connects her to other political and literary writing within the body of Anglo-Irish literature.[57] Watson also highlights that, while Patricia Lynch 'had drawn the attention of the outside world to the separate national existence of Ireland, Dillon had expanded that representation for Irish children to include them as European and world citizens too'.[58] As among the first Irish writers to be translated into a wide variety of languages, Dillon can be considered as a role model, in showing that it was possible to be successful as an Irish children's writer in an international context. In this she paved the way for authors who emerged in the early 1990s, notably Siobhán Parkinson and Marita Conlon McKenna, both of whom achieved worldwide success, thereby setting a standard for newer writers like Eoin Colfer, Darren Shan and Derek Landy. Interestingly, at the time of writing this dissertation, no female Irish children's writer has emerged who can compare with Dillon in terms of her prolific output.

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[52] O'Brien, Interview.

[53] Author Siobhán Parkinson was appointed Ireland's first *Laureate na nÓg* (Children's Laureate) by President McAleese, on 10 May 2010.

[54] Kiberd, "Eilís Dillon-Mercier – An Appreciation," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 19 July 1984.

[55] Eoghan Corry, "Obituary," *Irish Press* [Dublin] 20 July 1994.

Harte remembers that Dillon, while still promoting her own work throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, also generously encouraged emerging authors, exhibiting a 'genuine interest in helping young writers and helping people generally'.[59] His warm picture of Dillon, a portrait, once again, evocative of Lady Gregory, is worth quoting in full for its insight into Dillon's personal approach:

> She was more the taking-under-her-wing type. She was an older style kind of patroness. But she would get down and dirty and get stuck in and do things. She had a great matronly sense and she encouraged people, and she'd have parties in her house and invite people along. She was very sociable. She had a nice way with her. She wasn't precious at all but she wasn't doing the graft either. She was kind of

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[56] Celia Keenan, Preface, *Treasure Islands Studies in Children's Literature*, eds. Mary Shine Thompson and Celia Keenan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006) 9.
[57] Nancy Watson, *The Politics and Poetics of Irish Children's Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009) 39–40.
[58] Watson 19.
[59] Harte, Interview.

> an elder stateswoman at this stage so nobody was expecting her to. What she was doing, she was very good at, very encouraging.[60]

It is Kiberd's view that, since Dillon did not confine herself within generic borders, it is difficult to ascertain the genre for which she should be remembered most.[61] A Curriculum Vitae, prepared by her a year before she died, shows the apparent hierarchy that she applied to her work. She categorises various genres in descending order of her perceived importance, from adult novels, short stories, plays, poetry and finally to children's books. She mentions just two books; *Across the Bitter Sea*, for its international success and the children's book, *The Island of Horses*, as having been listed as among the hundred best books for children in *The Sunday Times*. It is unfortunate that neither the purpose of the *résumé* nor its intended recipient is known – factors that might have provided clues to the rationale for her ranking of genres.[62]

Dillon, despite her greater success with children's literature, seems to have had an ambivalent feeling towards it, rating her adult fiction more highly. Dunbar notes that Dillon played down her own storytelling skills in her children's work, insisting that it did not come naturally but was something learned through skill and craft.[63] Her method was successful however, since her child readers clearly enjoyed her novels. Some of their correspondence with Dillon, while amusing, also reveals the author's international popularity and, in tandem with worldwide positive reviews of her work, is a testament to her ability to connect with her young audience. Jon from Connecticut praised Dillon's skill in *The Singing Cave* and wrote to her saying, 'I think you are very gifted', while Annette from Australia requested pictures of the character, Aunt Bedelia, and of the author herself, stating that she 'enjoyed every minuet [*sic*] of reading the story'. Joseph in Pittsburgh wanted to know how he could get his own book published, while Niall from Sandymount, Dublin described *The San Sebastian* as 'the most thrilling book I ever read because many country's [*sic*] come into it'.[64] These comments are at the heart of Dillon's legacy in showing the real connection she had with her readers who, having had an engaging and absorbing reading experience, retained it in memory and were encouraged to read more. Dillon had a great respect for her child audience, finding them to be 'a wonderful, discerning and difficult public, quick to notice insincerity'[65] but worthy of the vision of childhood she presented and 'totally positive and unforgettable'.[66]

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[60] Harte, Interview.
[61] Kiberd, Interview.
[62] Dillon, 33345, "Curriculum Vitae."
[63] Dunbar, Interview.
[64] Dillon, 33346, "Correspondence."

However, by setting her children's books in an earlier Ireland, Dillon ran the risk of alienating future young readers who could no longer identify with what was to them, such a distant past. While Dillon's dream of being read by succeeding generations may not have been fulfilled to the extent that she would have wished, many of her books are still available worldwide mostly within the library system. Irish libraries generally display Dillon's books republished by O'Brien Press in the 1990s and early 2000s. National library catalogues in Europe, America, Canada and New Zealand among others, contain entries of many of her older books, although this is not an indicator of current popularity or readership. Nonetheless, extracts of her stories still appear in school texts and some of her novels were until recently recommended for classroom study with suggestions for curricular outcomes.[67] There are also numerous Internet references to Dillon's work for children and many of her books can be bought online from specialist booksellers.[68] Given limited availability, Dillon is, to some extent, managing to influence some young readers across the distance of time.

Those who knew Eilís Dillon retain a great sense of admiration for her achievement. Dunbar acknowledges that Dillon had done 'something worthwhile for Irish children, not only in terms of their reading but also had done something to elevate how Irish society had viewed children's literature'. He further states that 'she was genuinely very much a child-centred woman'.[69] O'Brien is equally complimentary of her skill and connects her to the Irish storytelling tradition of which she was so proud:

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[65] Marie O'Reilly, "Monday Mirror," *Irish Independent* [Dublin] 25 Mar. 1963.
[66] Eoghan Corry, *Irish Press* [Dublin] 20 July 1994.
[67] O'Brien Press, http://www.obrien.ie
[68] Most recently, in *The Drumming of Hooves and Other Stories – Streets Ahead English Language Series* (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 2001).
[69] Dunbar, Interview.

> She was overtaken by much more articulate voices but she had her place. And maybe one of the things that attracted me to her was that she was a storyteller essentially, rather than a writer with connections to the oral tradition. [...] I could see the quality of the oral storytelling [in her novels] in that she had great detail in them.[70]

Yet, in response to O'Brien, it can be argued that the writers who succeeded her were not necessarily more articulate or skilful but were writing for children of a new era and in a style suited to a new age within children's publishing. Dillon had shown signs of a change in tone and setting with *Children of Bach* (1992) and, given time, may have adapted her approach further in order to appeal to a new generation of readers.

Lost Legacy

As early as 1962, an interviewer identified in Dillon a conflict between 'her love and delight in writing for young people and her natural inclination to write a deeply serious novel'.[71] Although Dillon was enormously prolific as a writer, she continued to search for the perfect genre through which to demonstrate her skills. Apart from novelistic forms, this search led her to try her hand as a playwright, although only two of her plays were staged. Dillon admits that while she had plans to write other plays,[72] she was not then 'capable of the kind of single-minded determination that would have been necessary'.[73] The text of her radio play, *Manna*, broadcast in 1960, makes interesting reading since it shows the more quirky side to Dillon's writing, as she ridicules antediluvian jealousies within the academic world. Set in a university campus, it emerges as the drama progresses that the old professors have an excuse for their outmoded behaviour. With a similarity to Swift's 'Struldbrugs' and their 'natural desire of endless life', they have been living for three hundred years as the result of a scientific experiment.[74] A greater emphasis on this more inventive type of writing might have assured Dillon a more enduring literary legacy.

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[70] O'Brien, Interview.

[71] Jean Healy, "Face to Face with Eilís Dillon," *Creation Magazine* [Dublin] Aug. 1962, in Dillon 33339.

[72] A list of these plays appears in Dillon, 33276.

[73] Dillon, 333336, "Contemporary" 36.

[74] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, "Voyage to Laputa," Sec. 3 Ch. 10. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/829

Dillon had, however, a life-long affinity with the writing and translation of poetry. She recalled that even as a young girl she was drawn towards it and had translated Milton's "Lycidas" into Irish and some of Ronsard's sonnets into English.[75] She subsequently demonstrated her vast knowledge of the metrics and mechanics of poetry in writing what is 'probably the best translation of "*Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*"'.[76] Coming from a family of writers and poets, it is no surprise that Dillon was able to turn to poetry with ease and skill. Not only did she find it inspirational to read and translate, she also found it enjoyable to write. She had a number of poems published at various times,[77] some of them witty, like "A Pair", [78] a whimsical view of the animal world and "My Reorganised Universe", an insightful commentary on the function of the poet. A few of her poems are emotional, in particular, "Adopted Grandson", a beautiful welcome for her daughter's child. Dunbar praised the 'courtesy' and 'respect for individual dignity' in the poet's words.[79] However, Dillon was sometimes disparaging about the skill involved in writing poetry, claiming that it was merely a preparation for the writing of prose. This literary stance is puzzling and her reluctance to embrace poetry more consistently must be seen as a loss.[80] Perhaps her stated realisation that poetry was not good unless it was personal may explain her resistance towards undertaking it to a greater extent.[81] The poet necessarily reveals a lot about his or her inner thought processes and emotions, a tendency generally avoided by Dillon. She may also have seen, as Yeats did, that passion was the first essential of great poetry, and recognising her own deep-rooted inhibitions, found little urge within herself to expose that aspect of her personality.[82] Yet, one poem, found among her notes, concerning maternal relationships is particularly poignant and demonstrates the depth of feeling that she was capable of expressing in her writing.[83] It is a matter for conjecture whether Dillon, interested in poetry and possessing a remarkable facility with language, a seemingly effortless capacity with descriptive detail and an elegance in her depictions of nature, might have earned a respected reputation as a poet if she had pursued this form of writing in a more singular and determined way.

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[75] Dillon, 33344, "Publications reviewed by Dillon."
[76] Kiberd, Interview.
[77] Listed in Dillon, 33345.
[78] *Irish Times* [Dublin] 6 Mar. 1971.
[79] *Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 June 1991.
[80] Ní Chuilleanáin, Interview.
[81] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 16.
[82] In her code of practice for reviewers, she writes of the need for sensitivity in relation to reviewing poetry due to its personal nature.

What is beyond question however, is Dillon's committed approach to historical fiction. She regarded *Across the Bitter Sea*, the novel in which she invested the greatest amount of time and energy, and for which she is most remembered in Ireland and internationally, as her greatest literary achievement. Dillon, having 'put a lifetime of experience into the book' and having 'researched it very carefully', was gratified to know that it was used in university departments 'to bring history to life' and that the *London Times* had reviewed it as 'a novel of which Zola might have been proud'.[84] Its sequel, *Blood Relations*, a novel that also merged romantic and historical storylines, did not enjoy quite the same critical success. Since the time of their publication, Dillon's other historical books have faded from popular memory and are no longer readily available. By the time *The Interloper* was published in 1987, popular appetite for Dillon's novels had waned and, even though it marked a significant development in her style, this book unfortunately drew considerably less critical attention than *Across the Bitter Sea.*

Dillon's inclusion of ballads, many of which she translated, in her narratives for both adults and children, is of some importance in the Irish tradition. She endorsed Thomas Davis in his contention that ballads were suited to all ages, both for children who can enjoy their colour and rhythms in a basic way and for older people for whom ballads act as reminders of lives lived and sacrificed. Like Davis, Dillon upheld the power of the ballad to instruct the population in nationalist history, 'to tell men the past, present and future [...] so that generations shall feel and remember'. She too, very consciously became involved in the process of allowing ballads to 'pass from mouth to mouth like salutations', to become a means of passing on personal and national history and to transmit 'the memory of great men'.[85] For her, the ballad, a powerful treasury of memory, could commemorate and record people and events that would otherwise be quite forgotten',[86] while simultaneously 'raising national consciousness'.[87] A letter that Dillon received from a reader enquiring about the provenance of a ballad in the novel, *The Interloper*, concerning the reader's ancestors who were deported to New South Wales, illustrates the value that can be attributed to Dillon's efforts and the possibility that her translations may have importance for future scholars of Irish folklore.[88]

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[83] The poem (untitled) begins with the words 'My mother's agony / transferred to me.'
[84] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 39.

As Ó Cuilleanáin explains, it is a cause for regret that Dillon, although vigorous to the end, did not have a greater opportunity to use her more mature voice to describe her early experiences which had been both 'interesting and formative', and to say what she wanted to say without fear, and within the genres in which she could say it best.[89] Her notes contain ideas for at least three further adult novels at varying stages of completion. Just as she had done in her earlier unpublished short story, "Snobbery", she intended to include more personal detail in these stories than in her previous works, and appeared willing at last to lay bare the crisis of confidence that she experienced as a young person, alienated within her family. One of her untitled works centres again on the snobbery and ruthlessness of a controlling mother in the claustrophobic atmosphere of a Dublin household with the daughter feeling 'a sharp pain of terror that once more she was to be excluded'. In an incomplete draft of another projected novel, *Impossible Men* dated 1989, Dillon, writing about a mother who was alarmed at her daughter embarking on a bohemian lifestyle, confronts the relationship between the two women. These unfinished drafts have a greater openness and apparent honesty about them than anything Dillon had previously published, prompting the question of the possible critical impact that she would have had on adult literature if this more mature and uninhibited writer had been able to bring these projects to fruition. Instead, she selflessly turned to another task, the editing of her late husband's essays.

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[85] Thomas Osborne Davis, "A Ballad History of Ireland," from *Thomas Davis: Selections from his Prose and Poetry II, Literary and Historical Essays*, 16 June 2011 http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E800002-022/index.html.

[86] Dillon, 33342, "Press Cuttings" 38.

[87] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 37.

[88] Carole Dick, Letter, 10 June 1988, in Dillon, 33346, "Correspondence," enquiring about the ballad of the Connery family.

[89] Ó Cuilleanáin, http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors/dillon.html DATE.

It is significant that Dillon, always concerned about her lack of academic credentials, is remembered for two erudite works, neither of which were her original compositions but both of which amply indicate her undoubted academic ability. The first was the previously discussed translation of the "*Caoineadh*". The second was her highly acclaimed work as editor of a text on the study of Irish literature that had been started by Vivian Mercier, before his death. Dillon was proud of this achievement, remarking that the publishers may have imagined that she was not up to the task but that she had surprised them and even herself.[90] Kiberd writes in the introduction to the work: 'These essays, devotedly saved, assembled, and annotated by Eilís Dillon, are his testament'.[91] She had, finally put her name to a highly accomplished academic work, in which she showed her capabilities and strength in yet another sphere of writing.

Personal and Official Remembrance

Dillon is remembered and celebrated today principally through her considerable output of published works which, through careful reading, provide some insights into the author herself. Her personal impact and influence on other writers is more intangible, unquantifiable and for the most part anecdotal. However, media interviews provide glimpses into the personality, manner and tone of voice of the individual behind the writing persona. An early newspaper interview with Dillon portrays her as both personable and competent:

> She is a pleasant conversationalist and laughs easily; she has immense natural dignity and poise. It is impossible to imagine her in a situation with which she could not cope, whether catering at short notice for a hundred, steering a boat into Galway Bay in a gale or

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[90] *Irish Press* [Dublin] 15 Apr. 1993.

[91] Kiberd, Introduction to Vivian Mercier, *Modern Irish Literature: Sources and Founders*, ed. Eilís Dillon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

> explaining a point of theology in Italian. Her gifts are almost staggeringly varied and she is unusual in that she uses all of them.[92]

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, in an early memory of her mother, recalls watching her riding 'a big boned roughly groomed pony on Inishmore Island in 1948' and the pleasure Eilís derived in this pursuit. She contrasts this carefree delight in the outdoors with Dillon's disciplined approach to writing, remarking: 'My mother seems always to have been able to combine an enthusiasm for adventures with a taste for order; not a bad frame of mind for any artist'.[93] Kiberd remembers Dillon as being forthright in her views but happy to dispense advice, particularly enjoying guiding younger women in negotiating a male-dominated world. He recalls the tremendous self-possession and social confidence that seemed to belie the inner doubts she suffered. The overall portrait is of a woman who was good humoured, witty, capable, opinionated, intellectual, spiritual and generous with her time, as well as being a devoted mother who took great pride in her 'individualistic' children.[94] In a television interview a year before her death, Dillon wistfully described her attitude to coping with life by paraphrasing Beckett: 'I can't go on, I must go on'.[95] At that point she still had ambition to go on writing in the hope that, with the family history of longevity, she would continue doing so.

Given her large corpus of work, Dillon expected greater acclaim for her writing and expressed a deep disappointment at the lack of official recognition given to her in Ireland. In 1963 she stated: 'I have a great many admirers there, but I have never been honoured in any way'. In a further telling comment, she writes that 'the Irish make sure that no one will become conceited and they slap down any tendency in that direction unhesitatingly'.[96] O'Brien understands her feelings in this regard, noting that she had never attained the respect or media attention for her adult writing, such as that accorded to Edna O'Brien and others. He attributes Dillon's great need for appreciation and achievement as being due to her family background and the demands that this placed upon her. He asserts: 'She was a

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[92] Jean Healy, "Face to Face," *Creation Magazine* 1962, in Dillon, 33339.

[93] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, "Lifestyles, Kindred Series," *Sunday Tribune, Inside Magazine* [Dublin] 8 July 1984.

[94] Dillon, 33346, "Correspondence."

[95] Hanly, RTÉ.

[96] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 42.

Dillon and she felt very strongly about that and I think she felt she came from a sort of elite. It was almost like a clan. The Dillons were top drawer and she was straight from that tradition'.[97]

Dillon's disappointment was countered somewhat by the official honours that she eventually received. In 1972, she was appointed by the Irish Government to the newly-constituted Arts Council of Ireland and, in 1979, she was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (FRSL). Since the latter was awarded by a British organisation, Dillon as a nationalist, felt compelled to justify her acceptance of it. In a poignant acknowledgement of her lack of academic qualifications, she explains, 'I had no difficulty in deciding to accept, since the letters FRSL are the only ones I am entitled to place after my name'.[98] In 1981, she received a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship at Bellagio in Italy, and further Irish awards followed soon afterwards. In the same year, she became a member of *Aosdána* – the form of recognition for which she had previously campaigned on behalf of writers.[99] In 1992, she was finally awarded her much desired academic qualification, a *D Lit Honoris Causa*, by the National University of Ireland. In 1990, her children's book, *The Island of Ghosts*, was awarded the Bisto Book of the Year award, a final confirmation of her status as a children's writer. Dillon has also been recognised posthumously, most notably through the Eilís Dillon Children's Literature Award which, presented each year for a first book by a new writer, is an acknowledgement of Dillon's encouragement of emerging talent.

In assessing the numerous reviews Dillon received over a number of decades, a pattern of perceived neglect emerges. A feature article in 1962 states: 'Though she is one of the most competent, prolific and serious women writers in the country today, the name of Eilís Dillon is not nearly as familiar as it deserves to be'. The journalist admits that the nation is partially at fault in being 'sadly neglectful' of its native writers but also believes that Dillon seems not to seek publicity and that her books are published without 'fanfare or ballyhoo'.[100] Ten years later, an *Irish Times* commentator, who regards Dillon as 'positively one of our best writers of traditional stories of adventure', queries why her books are not produced by Irish publishers and not more widely publicised.[101] The answer probably lies in the low status accorded to authors who were known mainly as writers of children's literature. Despite this perception, Dillon's name consistently appears in newspaper archives, not only in relation to her writing but also in connection with literary and social occasions.

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[97] O'Brien, Interview.

[98] Dillon, 33336, "Contemporary" 42.

[99] Dillon and Anthony Cronin were both elected on 21 Dec. 1992.

[100] Jean Healy, "Face to Face with Eilís Dillon," *Creation Magazine*, Aug. 1962.

Journalist Kevin Myers, writing almost thirty years later, describes Dillon as a woman of 'modesty and grace', with 'enormous strength of purpose and pride in her land', 'a pride that should properly be reciprocated' by the Irish people. He commends Dillon's range of fiction as 'quite simply beyond compare within Irish letters'.[102] Dillon is posthumously commemorated as part of the Literary Parade, a monument to Irish writers from Swift to Beckett, in St Patrick's Park, Dublin, as well as on a plaque erected in her honour in Barna, County Galway, where she spent the most influential part of her childhood and which she remembered with such affection. Currently, the board of the Irish Writers' Centre, has plans to commemorate Dillon and other deceased writers by naming some rooms on their premises in their honour.[103] Despite these types of recognition, Dillon's standing as a writer is often overlooked. *Irish Times* journalist, Eileen Battersby, writing of the *Field Day Anthology*,[104] is critical of Dillon's omission from the work, commenting on it as proof that 'no writers are as marginalised as those who write for younger readers', a specialist area with a strong female tradition.[105] It is significant, however, that Battersby holds no expectation that Dillon might have been considered for inclusion as a writer for adults, an indication of her lack of status in this field. A similar oversight is evident in poet Robert Greacen's letter to the *Irish Times* in 2004. While he commends the decision of the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature to commemorate Dillon posthumously, on the basis that she 'gave much time and effort to furthering the aims of the Irish Writers' Union',[106] he also, in a possible inadvertent assessment of her literary standing, fails to endorse

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[101] *Irish Times* [Dublin] 19 Dec. 1972.
[102] Kevin Myers, "Modesty and Grace," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 Nov. 1991.
[103] The other writers who are being similarly honoured are Robert Greacen, Michael Hartnett, Eithne Strong, Benedict Kiely, Mary Lavin and James Plunkett.
[104] Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha et al. *Field Day*, 2002.
[105] "Stalked by an Agenda," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 5 Oct. 2002.
[106] Robert Graecen, "Letters to the Editor," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 6 Feb. 2004.

Dillon's extensive literary output. It is unfortunate, that given her interesting family background, her commitment to writing, her sheer dedication to the history of her family and that of the nation, and her success as a female writer of the latter half of the twentieth century, that Dillon's large corpus of work is not more widely remembered today.

Conclusion: A Final Appreciation

In a final evaluation of Dillon's life and work, following her death in 1994, Declan Kiberd, extolled her virtues as a writer and friend. In his *Irish Times* article of appreciation, he wrote of her accomplishments:

> The death of Eilís Dillon-Mercier has removed from the Irish scene not only a graceful and accomplished writer, but also a powerful and influential advocate in the cause of all artists. It would be difficult for any friend or commentator to do justice to the versatility of her literary output, the lucid grace of her prose, the warmth and range of her friendships, or to the firmness of spirit, the shrewdness of purpose with which she launched herself into many worthy projects.[107]

Kiberd went on to express his regard by comparing Dillon to Lady Augusta Gregory as a 'woman of letters', suggesting that Yeats's poetic tribute to Gregory, "Coole Park 1929", was an equally fitting epitaph for her. He remembered that, like Lady Gregory, Dillon had dispensed kindness and good advice to many young artists over the years. Indeed, phrases like 'a woman's powerful character' and 'excellent company' taken from the poem seem a good match for her personality. Yeats's exhortation to dedicate 'a moment's memory to that laurelled head' seems an appropriate means of commemorating Eilís Dillon as a writer of note. It would also appear to be a culmination of all that Dillon had desired. There surely could be no higher accolade in her view than to be recalled through the verse of Yeats, her literary hero, and to be considered as a 'traveller, scholar, poet' and praised for her 'intellectual sweetness'.

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[107] Declan Kiberd, "Appreciation," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 19 July 1994.

Reflecting recently on his comparison of Dillon with Lady Gregory, Kiberd allows for the emotion shown by him in the aftermath of the loss of 'a valuable friend' but he is clear about his rationale. He feels that Dillon had a lot in common with the Revivalist writer by publishing 'a bit of everything over a long literary career' and in dealing with the past rather than with the relevant issues of her day. He sees other similarities since Lady Gregory was also 'motherly' yet strong, a republican who wrote about history and 'discharged a comparable role' in artistic society, by encouraging and showing hospitality to other writers. Kiberd writes: 'Eilís Dillon-Mercier was a woman of letters of a kind not seen in Ireland since the days of Augusta Gregory – an essayist, novelist, autobiographer, activist, dramatist, translator, scholar and mother-figure to two generations of writers and artists'.[108] Most significantly, Kiberd remembers his concern at the time of Dillon's death that she might, like Lady Gregory who was overshadowed by Yeats, be somewhat neglected into the future. His admiration for Dillon is obvious. While agreeing that some of her work was 'a little formulaic' and 'not as instinctive or creative' as it might have been, he feels that she achieved a lot for her time. He particularly emphasises that she had continued writing despite a lack of family affirmation, and believes that 'to be confident after such discouragement' was a particular personal triumph. He also believes that Dillon, as a product of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, belonged to the last era of the 'great man of letters', when writers like O'Faoláin were willing to experiment and sometimes fail in their efforts. However, in making the comparison with Lady Gregory, a writer from the previous generation, Kiberd is perhaps highlighting the public perception of Dillon's affiliation with the past, with the era of the Literary Revival, thereby presenting her as a writer who did not feature so notably alongside her contemporaries.

Although this appreciation is one that Dillon might have desired, she has unfortunately not entered the national consciousness as part of the great Irish writing tradition. Despite being fondly remembered and often highly regarded within children's literature circles, her dream of talking to readers 'across the generations' has only partially been fulfilled. It is ironic that Dillon's crime novels which she dismissed as merely part of her apprenticeship, have been republished and are the books most likely to be read and appreciated by a modern audience. Harte, in a comment that concurs with Dillon's own idea of legacy, states:

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[108] Kiberd, "Appreciation."

> I think every writer would like to be remembered as a writer and for the work that they produced. That would be the most important thing, that her work would still be read in twenty years time, fifty years time, whatever it is. I think she, like every other writer, would have that as her chief wish.[109]

While this aspiration has not been fully attained, there is no doubt that Dillon, in keeping with her forebears, who upheld the patriotic tradition of contributing to society in whatever way they could, deserves to be remembered as a talented, hard-working, diligent and professional writer who displayed virtuosity as well as generosity of spirit - surely a worthy legacy for any artist. Borrowing from Swift's epitaph, cited earlier, it is apposite that aspiring writers might be advised to 'go forth and copy' this 'vigorous' (to the best of her ability) champion of writers and practitioner of her art.

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[109] Harte, Interview.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis set out to establish the extent to which Eilís Dillon's persistent reliance on memory as a means of representing Ireland's past became a 'tyranny' – that is an inhibiting or a restrictive force, as opposed to an enabling power that provided a sense of identity and reassurance. The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this study included the undertaking of a critical survey and an analysis of Dillon's prodigious output from a biographical standpoint, allied with a historico-literary analysis underpinned by memory theory. Successive chapters of this dissertation have identified the various aspects of Dillon's life which contributed to her determined evocation of earlier eras. They have also confirmed the author's dependence on personal and collective family memory as the inspiration for most of her work.

The thesis began with an emphasis in Chapter One on the background forces that shaped Dillon's approach, namely: a strong awareness of, and pride in, her ancestral history; her family's revolutionary past; various literary influences, among them WB Yeats and Seán O'Faoláin; significant family relationships, as well as the memory of the traumatic events of her early childhood. It then examined, in Chapter Two, Dillon's affiliation to the remembered landscape and language of her youth. It also focused on her respect for Irish poetry and her skilled translation into English of *"Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire"*, a poem founded on memory. Dillon's success in creating for children a literature that was recognisably Irish in tone and subject matter, was then analysed in Chapter Three, which also highlighted the author's continued use of the west of Ireland as her chosen *lieu sacré*. Using the western islands as settings, and presenting their people as guardians of Irish culture and tradition, Dillon promoted a positive expression of Irish nationality, while also creating literary memories of an earlier time for new generations of readers. Through her adventure stories for teenagers, she encouraged the development of self-confidence in Ireland's young population, a trait that had eluded her in her own youth but one which she saw as essential to the country's future. Chapters Four and Five identified not only Dillon's creative restlessness and experimentation with genre, but also her parallel self-restriction to chosen themes and approaches founded in memory. Across a variety of genres, the author presented the ambience of a former age, finally discovering in historical fiction what she believed was her particular *métier*. In six historical novels, Dillon engaged in depictions of her bilateral family history and of the changing nature of Irish society, as the old Ascendancy order gave way to a new Ireland following the achievement of independence. The final chapter of this thesis assessed Dillon's contribution to Irish life and culture, the ways in which she is remembered and the legacy she endowed to the world of literature.

It is envisaged that this thesis will contribute substantially to the body of knowledge concerning Dillon's writing and will encourage other researchers to undertake diverse studies of elements which, although alluded to within this dissertation, could not be expanded upon within the parameters of this work. The digital tool, outlined in Volume II, forms a significant component within this dissertation in that it directs researchers and interested parties to bibliographic information on the corpus of Dillon's works, with publication details of their many editions and translations. It facilitates browsing under a number of facets, thereby enabling greater access to her titles. There is also scope within the framework of the website for digital scholars to develop the project through successive levels of digital enhancement and to provide greater interactive capacity for the user. Most importantly, the website, having been created as part of a thesis that specifically explores the role of memory in Dillon's work, also functions mnemonically as a fitting commemoration of the author's extensive output.

While the digital aspect of this thesis as outlined in Volume II concentrates on possible future developments, this first volume has firmly established Dillon's determined reflection on the past and the notable backward glance within her work. However, retrospection is not unusual in the Irish context. Almost half a century after Augustine Martin, quoted in the introduction to this thesis, commented on the propensity of Irish writers to evoke history, his opinions still resonate. He queried why Irish authors seemed to regard their past as so unique that they persisted in 'gazing backwards lovingly at it'.[1] The continued relevance of Martin's question is evident in recent controversy surrounding current writers, among them, Colm Tóibín, Joseph O'Connor, Roddy Doyle and Sebastian Barry, who, in setting novels in former times rather than within their contemporary environment, can be accused of falling into a typically Irish pattern of embracing the past and failing to connect with the 'electric currents of the culture'.[2] It can be argued, as Benedict Kiely once alleged, that due to the intrusion of memory, 'all novels are, to some extent, historical novels'.[3] Equally, as Eileen Battersby asserts, to deny writers access to their memory of the past, 'that most eloquent of places', is to curtail their artistic freedom.[4] It has also been particularly useful for aspiring writers to turn to the past for inspiration at an early stage in their careers since, as Martin clarifies, 'it is easier to write of a past that is petrified and will stand still, rather than to try to fix and render a present that is in flux, that changes before our eyes'.[5] The difficulty arises when a view of the past becomes the single perspective of the writer who, like Dillon, with a form of literary myopia, persists in using a retrospective gaze as the predominant compass point.

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[1] Martin 95.

Reliance on the past is variously viewed either as a benefit or a burden, a contrast exemplified in the attitudes of Joyce and Yeats. In the words of the character Stephen Dedalus, Joyce describes 'history as a nightmare' from which he seeks to awaken, while Yeats, pondering on his enumeration of 'themes of the embittered heart', admits 'it was the dream itself enchanted me'.[6] Dillon, with a great love of history and a wealth of family historical material at her disposal, remained somewhat entranced by the dreams promulgated by the leaders of 1916, by the patriotic values passed on to her, and by the need to recall what she perceived as a glorious time in Irish history. Writers and commentators have repeatedly warned of 'the disabling influence of the past'[7] and urged that the pull of tradition should be transcended.[8] O'Faoláin counselled that there came a point for the writer 'at which old values and interpretations have to be discarded', when

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[2] The controversy was initiated by Julian Gough, http://www.juliangough.com Feb 2011 and http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/feb/11/julian-gough-irish-novlists-priestly-caste . It was followed up in the pages of the *Irish Times* and *Guardian* newspapers.
[3] Benedict Kiely, "The Historical Novel", *The Genius of Irish Prose*, Ser. Thomas Davis Lecture, ed. Augustine Martin (Dublin & Cork: Mercier Press with RTÉ, 1984) 53.
[4] Eileen Battersby, "Finding the Present in the Past," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 Mar. 2010.
[5] Martin 95.
[6] James Joyce, "Episode 2 Nestor," *Ulysses* (1922) (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1960) 40. WB Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," *Last Poems*, 1939.
[7] Shaun Richards, "Breaking the Cracked Mirror," *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, eds. Colin Graham & Richard Kirkland (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999) 103.
[8] Deane, "Remembering the Irish Future," *The Crane Bag*, 8:1. (Dublin: Crane Bag, 1984) 82.

'one throws away all previous lenses' and faces the 'ruthless close-ups' expected of contemporary fiction.[9] For Dillon, this new point of realisation never came and she eschewed the idea of the microscopic analysis of contemporary life. She preferred the other, more romantic view of Ireland, described by O'Faoláin as being 'in memory, in age and in exile', at 'her loveliest and most indubitable'. Although a great devotee of his work, Dillon, being absorbed in memory, ignored O'Faoláin's cautionary words that reminded writers to be wary of the danger of being overtaken by 'past worship'. Frank O'Connor was judged as exemplary in this regard, since 'he refused to be dominated by any historical mystique', 'never allowed any idol to tyrannise him' and, in particular, did not allow 'Ireland to tyrannise him'.[10] O'Faoláin repeatedly warned of the possible pitfalls in remaining rooted in an increasingly irrelevant past and of engaging in 'a tyranny of the mind', through the idealisation of an abstract and outmoded nationalism. Conversely, he believed that engagement with history could be liberating if the writer could vacillate between 'tradition and revolt'.[11] Dillon, as demonstrated, embraced tradition wholeheartedly and supported Ireland's revolutionary past but, for reasons summarised below, resisted any urge to join in literary revolt. Derek Hand suggests that the real act of rebellion for a writer 'is to be found in the power of rendering one's own story in one's own inimitable style'.[12] Dillon was reluctant to do this in any depth.

Suffering from what she described as 'a crippling lack of confidence', Dillon did not wish to publish anything that revealed inner tensions or that would reflect badly on herself, on her family, or indeed, on her country, which would thereby draw opprobrium of any kind.[13] Her early life experiences, described with a rare slip of her mask of stoicism in *Inside Ireland*, were of enormous significance. The trauma that she suffered as a small child, in an atmosphere of communal fear and political turmoil, remained with her throughout her life. In addition, the political arguments of the adults and the stories narrated by them, however well intentioned, must have proved frightening for a young child, unable to make sense of them. Dillon did not like to dwell openly on the concept of fear and, indeed, it rarely appears in her writing, where her protagonists are brave, loyal and proud. This urge to evade any denigration of family is evident throughout her work, and may have been the reason for avoidance or suppression of significant memory, or a means of concealing her personal anxiety. Always maintaining a dignified silence in relation to family difficulties, Dillon was slow to reveal details of her uneasy relationship with her mother and the 'emotional exclusion' she felt.[14] Geraldine's strong presence throughout Dillon's life may also have been an inhibiting factor for Eilís who, being scrupulous about maintaining family honour, did not dare to approach risqué subjects or contentious contemporary themes. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, in attempting to understand how her grandmother had coped with the dreadful events of 1916 and her brother's execution, concludes that Geraldine survived the difficult parts of her life by refusing to admit to any emotional attachment.[15] This same reserve, or what she deemed to be objectivity or distance, became a feature of Dillon's books and led to an air of detachment in her work. This prevented her from engaging in fiction that was less descriptive and more akin to the contemporary concept of an 'adventure of the mind'. By focusing on the minutiae of the lives of historical figures and family members, Dillon became a spokesperson for them and repressed, sublimated or chose to keep private her own sentiments.

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[9] Ó Faoláin, "Romance and Realism," *The Bell* X, Aug. 1945, 378.

[10] Ó Faoláin, "The Death of Nationalism," *The Bell* XVII, 2 May 1951, 46.

[11] Ó Faoláin, "Death" 53; 51.

[12] Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011) 7.

[13] Dillon, 333336 "Contemporary" 21.

Living much of her life among academics also provided Dillon with regular reminders of what she saw as her shortcomings in the area of higher education. Her repeated allusions to the reading material of her fictional, well-read characters may be symptomatic of Dillon's need to prove her own scholarship, and the vast historical knowledge evident in her novels exemplifies her undoubted erudition. Her sense of inadequacy was probably further compounded by media perception of her immediate family as high achievers, with comparisons of her efforts being repeatedly made to those of her parents and siblings.[16] It is significant that Dillon was still allied to her family history in the public consciousness even in her later life. In what was meant to be a celebration of her work as a writer, David Hanly, in his television interview, failed to question Dillon about any of her publications and focused exclusively on her family history. This was viewed by in one account as 'patronising'[17] and an unfair approach towards a writer of her calibre and level of success, who had also 'with firmness of spirit and shrewdness of purpose [...] launched herself into many worthy projects' during her career.[18]

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[14] Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, http://www.ruemorguepress.com/authors/dillon.html

[15] Irene Gilsenan Nordin, "The Weight of Words: An Interview with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Canadian Association of Irish Studies, 28.2–29.1 (Fall, 2002 – Spring, 2003): 74–83, 11 June 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25515428.

[16] Michael Campbell, "Books and Authors," *The Irish Times* [Dublin] 29 Mar. 1958, http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/archive/1974/0305/Pg010.html 9 Nov. 2009 and Nichevo, "An Irishman's Diary" *Irish Times* [Dublin] 11 Feb. 1950.

Dillon's admirable facility with words, her capacity for powerful descriptions of landscape and her success with translation, all indicate a poetic talent, albeit one which she chose not to pursue to any great extent. The reason for this may lie in the competitive tendency within the family. To vie with the celebrated efforts of her uncle and the early writings of her mother, both poets, might not have allowed Dillon to establish herself with a separate identity in the genre, and would have cemented the perception of her as an imitator rather than an initiator. A generation later, this need to add something new to the family catalogue of achievement emerges in Ní Chuilleanáin's choice of writing poetry over prose, a decision she admits was partially taken in order not to emulate her mother's writing achievements. She explains that her late sister Máire had been similarly affected and had decided to become a professional musician on the basis that there were already too many writers in the family.[19] It was only at the end of her life that Dillon herself had finally thrown off the shackles of family criticism and competition, when both of her parents had passed on. As a relatively successful author, well-regarded internationally, she then could begin to experiment to a greater extent in her writing. However, as noted, this sense of freedom came too late in her life to result in a large body of new work.

In writing about past events, Dillon inhabited a literary haven within which she avoided tackling the restrictions, prejudices and inadequacies of contemporary society. The choice for writers in Ireland at a time of cultural and sexual repression was a 'stark' one – to 'stay quiet or invent something new'.[20] Not fully content to stay quiet, Dillon chose instead to chronicle her family's glorious past as transmitted to her through collective memory. Engaging with Renan's aforementioned cult of her personal ancestry and an exaggerated reverence for her forebears, Dillon felt a duty to commemorate and record their deeds in a manner that was fitting to their status. Taking on the mantle of responsibility towards her antecedents, Dillon paid tribute to their achievements in her individual way through her fiction. This compulsion to revive and maintain historical accounts can be rationalised in the interrelated concepts of 'archive-memory', 'duty-memory' and 'distance memory'.[21] The obsession with narrating the past and of having tangible records and evidence derives from a natural anxiety and fear of loss. As Nora states:

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[17] Television Review, *Sunday Independent* [Dublin] 24 July 1994. The Hanly interview was replayed following Dillon's death.

[18] Kiberd, "Appreciation," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 19 July 1994.

[19] Patricia Boyle Haberstroh, "Interview with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin," *Irish University Review* 37.1, Special Issue: *Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin* (Spring-Summer, 2007): 36-49, 15 May 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/25517334.

> Fear of a rapid and final disappearance combines with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future to give even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige, the potential dignity of the memorable.[22]

With a family background such as Dillon's, this tension is magnified, since there is a considerable reputation at stake. As older members die and the participants in great events are no longer there to give first-hand accounts, it becomes incumbent on a person who knows their stories to pass them on to future generations. As momentous events of the past become more distant in time, the need to remember becomes ever more urgent and the impetus to commemorate gains greater importance. Dillon, aware of the significance of the lives of previous generations, embraced the role of archivist with admirable commitment and dedication in her fictional accounts. Nora explains: 'When memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means'.[23] This task had positive results for Dillon, since it allowed her to prove herself as a writer of substance, both within her family and among academics, as well as in the broader literary community. Her novels, as expressions of family pride, 'researched with scholarly scruples and written with a tremendous attention to exactitude of language' became fictionalised records of her family history and, in tandem, became her individual contribution to the historiography of the Irish nation.[24]

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[20] Fintan O'Toole, "The fantastic Flann O'Brien," Special Supplement, 100 Myles, *Irish Times*, 1 Oct. 2011.

[21] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History" 16.

[22] Nora 13.

[23] Nora 16.

Such merging of one's life and history is not unusual in an Irish context. Maurice Goldring, quoted by JJ Lee, reminds us that 'Ireland is a country where history is autobiographical and autobiography historical', and that this interconnectedness is 'an important indication to the way in which a man of letters considers his status in the country'.[25] This explanation seems particularly apt in relation to Dillon, an aspiring woman of letters, whose status and identity were defined by family background and by Ireland's history. Dillon defended her retrospective stance, stating that 'the business of a serious writer is to be an interpreter of his own people and their history'. She also justified her subject matter as not self-chosen but imposed, suggesting that topics naturally force themselves on the writer, in a 'concordance between the subject and the temperament of the author'.[26] In an interesting parallel, Vivian Mercier, commenting in 1957 about Flaubert's writing as 'cerebral rather than intuitive', asserts: 'His books were what they were because he was what he was'.[27] Mercier could equally have applied this statement to the work of his future wife, whose writing was what it was because she was a Plunkett Dillon.

There is a sense in which history can be liberating to those who do not see it as an imposition. Yeats's remark that 'history is necessity until it takes fire in someone's head and becomes freedom or virtue', is apposite.[28] Since history allowed Dillon to define herself within a long family tradition, she found a sense of virtue in depicting aspects of it. However, despite her intense absorption in the past, it appears that she did not allow history to ignite the creative inner spark that was essential to liberate her style of writing or to expand her literary horizons. Instead she remained caught between two worlds.

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[24] Kiberd, "Appreciation," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 19 July 1994.

[25] JJ Lee, Introduction, *Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) xii.

[26] Dillon to Heinrich Boll, Draft of letter, 1983, DFA.

[27] Vivian Mercier, "The Limitations of Flaubert," *The Kenyon Review*, 19.3 (Summer, 1957): 400-417, 15 May 2011 http://www.jstor.org.remote.library.dcu.ie/stable/4333767.

[28] WB Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962) 336.

Unlike O'Faoláin and O'Connor, Dillon did not belong with the writers who had played a part in the formation of the state. Nor was she one of the later breed of writers who could dispassionately inherit its benefits. Pulled in both directions, backward towards the revolution and forward towards progress in the middle years of the twentieth century, she was caught in a world in transition. Her own re-creation in a university setting of an upper-class way of life that had faded in a new Ireland is indicative of her situation, balanced between two regimes. Equally, her complex dual allegiance to ancient Irish culture, its traditions and language, and simultaneously to Anglo-Irish influences, created a tension for her in her efforts to establish an immediately recognisable literary identity. Similarly, her diverse talents as a children's author, adult novelist, translator and poet drew her into a wide range of diverse genres, with the effect of diluting, rather than establishing a distinctive narrative voice. This confusion of styles may have been a factor in the limited literary and theoretical attention that she attracted, as commentators struggled to define her role. This thesis, in highlighting Dillon's extensive use of Big House tropes, many of them encapsulated in her final novel, may allow her to be critiqued in the future alongside her contemporaries who engaged in this genre, among them Jennifer Johnston, Molly Keane and JG Farrell.

Many of Dillon's adult novels deal with the emigrant's yearning for Ireland and with his memory of home serving as a comfort in strange places. Finding herself somewhat estranged in a rapidly changing world, Dillon seems to have found contentment in dealing with the numerous fragments of her family past, revelling in the glories of her ancestry and of nationalist sacrifice, and remembering a place where she had been happy within the rose-tinted 'islands' of her childhood.

Dillon herself did not appear to perceive the past as a personal tyranny, choosing instead to view it as an *entrée* into a world of literature that, in her eyes, liberated rather than repressed her talent. Furthermore, since there is a possibility for all tyrants to become benevolent given the passage of time, or even to act benignly in certain circumstances, it can be seen in Dillon's case that the past, however capable of exerting tyranny, also benignly provided literary assurance for her as a writer. It presented her with a sense of immunity from the criticism that she feared she would have received, had she dealt with more contemporary themes. Moreover, it opened up a pathway to a credible professional career. Recalling Silone's opinion 'that every writer has only one story he wants to write and that his life's work will contain variations on this theme in spite of him', Dillon quotes the inscription he dedicated to her: '*E un'altra storia ma sempre la stessa storia*', (It's a new story but always the same story).[29] The story that Dillon chose to tell, and enjoyed narrating, was that of her family history and of her country, and in what might be termed 'disguised biography',[30] was one that she told in a professional and diligent manner. It was also enjoyed by thousands of readers worldwide.

Dillon performed her task with an extreme sense of duty, drawn in by 'the pull of the nation', the same attraction that called other family members to serve their country culturally, politically and militarily. Kevin Myers summarises the intensity of Dillon's heritage, believing that 'if there is such a thing as native aristocracy in this Republic with pride in creed and breed and seed, Eilís Dillon belongs to it'.[31] Continuing with the sense of *noblesse oblige* - or what she preferred to call 'Christian charity'[32] - that had guided her ancestors, Dillon dutifully, as a link in the chain of tradition, sought to contribute positively to the development of the nation while connecting new generations to their past. Imbued with what Sir Horace Plunkett called the 'will to serve', the urge to 'follow the path of social endeavour' while taking 'pride in those from whom we sprang', Dillon undertook her own duty to the nation.[33] One of the characters in her novel, *Blood Relations*, states that if he did not serve his country, he would 'be ashamed forever' before all his ancestors 'and before God'.[34] Dillon's ancestors could only have been proud of the brave efforts of a writer of great integrity who confronted and celebrated her Plunkett Dillon past. Emily Lawless, whose work in recounting the national tale can be seen as a forerunner to Dillon's similar undertaking, referred to the obligation that the writer must fulfil for those who have gone before:

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[29] Dillon, 33333, "Ignazio Silone" 2.
[30] Hand 7.
[31] Kevin Myers, "Modesty and Grace," *Irish Times* [Dublin] 16 Nov. 1991.
[32] Hanly, Interview, RTÉ.
[33] Plunkett, *Noblesse Oblige* 36.
[34] Dillon, *Blood* 31.

> To live again in the memory of those who come after them may not be – let us sincerely hope that it is not – essential to the happiness of those who are gone, but it is at least a tribute which the living ought to be called upon to pay, and to pay moreover ungrudgingly, as they hope to have it paid to them in their turn.[35]

Dillon was extremely diligent in paying tribute to those who went before her. In doing so 'ungrudgingly' and with obvious enthusiasm, any suggested sense of tyranny was self-imposed and dutifully accepted. Eilís Dillon was content, as Augustine Martin describes, 'to look over the heads of the present and wade through the welter of life to revive the ghosts of the past', into whose world she had been born. Their voices urged her to remember with pride, honesty and determintion, Ireland's unique culture, traditions and language, as well as its revolutionary history.[36]

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[35] Emily Lawless, Preface, *The Story of Ireland*, Ch. LIX, 227 (London: Ishister & Co. 1902) http://www.failteromhat.com/book/lawless-storyofireland.php.
[36] Martin 95.

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Appendix A

Eilís Dillon (1920-94) - A Biographical Note

Eilís Dillon was born on 7 March, 1920, in Galway in the west of Ireland. Her father, Thomas Dillon from Sligo became professor of chemistry in Galway University and was renowned for his work on the chemistry of seaweed. Dillon's mother Geraldine was the daughter of George Noble Count Plunkett and Josephine Cranny, and was a sister of Joseph Mary Plunkett who was executed in Kilmainham Gaol for his leading role in the 1916 Easter Rising. Thomas and Geraldine Plunkett Dillon were both politically active and were imprisoned by the British for their involvement in the Irish War of Independence (1921-22)[1].

Both the Dillons and Plunketts had, since their arrival in Ireland in the twelfth century, played significant roles in Irish history. The Dillon family had a long and distinguished military tradition, having given its name to one of the regiments of the Irish Brigade that departed Jacobean Ireland with the 'Wild Geese',[2] to fight in the service of the French King until 1784. Other Dillons were significant throughout Irish history, agitating for Irish independence and participating in political life until the middle of the twentieth century. The Plunketts, also active in Irish public life, had links with the wealthy land-owning [3] Plunketts of Dunsany and Killeen in County Meath and claimed kinship with St. Oliver Plunkett, executed for treason at Tyburn, London, in 1681.[4]

It was into this combined family heritage that Eilís Dillon was born, the third of five children. Her early years were spent in Galway, first living in Dangan

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[1] Also known as the Anglo-Irish War.

[2] 'The Wild Geese' is the name given to the members of the Irish Jacobite army under the command of Patrick Sarsfield who departed from Ireland to France following the Treaty of Limerick in 1691.

[3] The term 'aristocratic' is used as in Anne Chambers book *At Arms' Length Aristocrats in the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin: New Island, 2004) and by Dillon herself in *Inside Ireland.*

[4] Archbishop Oliver Plunkett (1629-1681) was canonised a Catholic saint in 1975.

House near Moycullen in Connemara and later in Barna, where she attended the local rural primary schools. Dillon attained fluency in the Irish language, speaking it at home with her father and at play with the local children. She and her sisters attended the Ursuline Convent School in Sligo, where Eilís received, by her own account, a relatively liberal secondary education.[5] However, on leaving school, Dillon, unlike her sisters, was inexplicably denied the opportunity of a university education and was sent by her mother to work in the hotel and catering trade performing menial tasks. At the age of twenty she met and married thirty-seven year-old Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, who later became Professor of Irish at University College Cork. The couple lived on the Cork College campus where Eilís embarked formally on her writing career, while simultaneously raising three children and running the student's hostel at the Warden's House.

In the early 1960s, due to Ó Cuilleanáin's ill health, the family moved to Rome where the weather was more beneficial, returning to Ireland in 1970, shortly before his death. She later married a long-time friend, American-based academic, Vivian Mercier, and they lived in California where Mercier was Professor of English in the University of Santa Barbara. While there, Dillon taught creative writing classes which she had also done for periods in University College Dublin and later in Trinity College. The couple returned to Ireland in 1987, two years before Mercier's death. In 1990, Dillon suffered another loss when her daughter Máire, a professional cellist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, also died.

Dillon's writing career spanned six decades, beginning with the publication in 1948 of her first book for children, *An Choill Bheo*, one of three stories written in the Irish language. She subsequently wrote in English, and throughout her long career, published works ranging from tales for very young children to novels for teenagers, literary, crime and historical fiction for adults, as well as plays for stage and radio. Dillon was also a skilled poet, a translator of note and a distinguished editor. Her early works of fiction include three crime novels, an unusual choice of genre for a young Irish female writer at that time.

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[5] David Hanly, *Writer in Profile* Television RTÉ 30 June 1993.

During the 1950s Dillon established herself as a writer for children and among her numerous titles are the best-selling island adventure novels including *The Lost Island* (1952), *The Island of Horses* (1956) and *The Singing Cave* (1959). Published in 1969, *The Seals*, set during the War of Independence, is perhaps her most significant book for young people. Dillon's most famous adult book, the historical novel *Across the Bitter Sea*, was published in 1973 in Britain and the United States and was generally well received. Dillon was popular both in Ireland and internationally and her books were translated into sixteen languages.[6]

Dillon played a major role in literary and artistic organisations and undertook tours of the United States during the 1970s and 80s promoting Irish literature and culture. She was given official recognition by her appointment to *Aosdána* and her conferral with a *D.Lit Honoris Causa* at University College Cork in 1988. A special Eilís Dillon Award is presented annually in her memory as part of the Children's Books Ireland Bisto Book of the Year Awards. Dillon won the main Bisto Award in 1989 for her children's book, *The Island of Ghosts*.

Eilís Dillon died on 19 July 1994 and is buried in Clara Co. Offaly. She is survived by her daughter, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, poet and Associate Professor of English at Trinity College Dublin, by her son Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, Associate Professor and Head of Italian, also at Trinity College, and by her grandchildren.

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[6] A full list of all her published work is listed on the website http://research.dho.ie/dillon/ that accompanies this thesis. Dillon's unpublished work exists in draft and unfinished form in her manuscript collection in the National Library of Ireland.

Appendix B Pages 1, 2 3

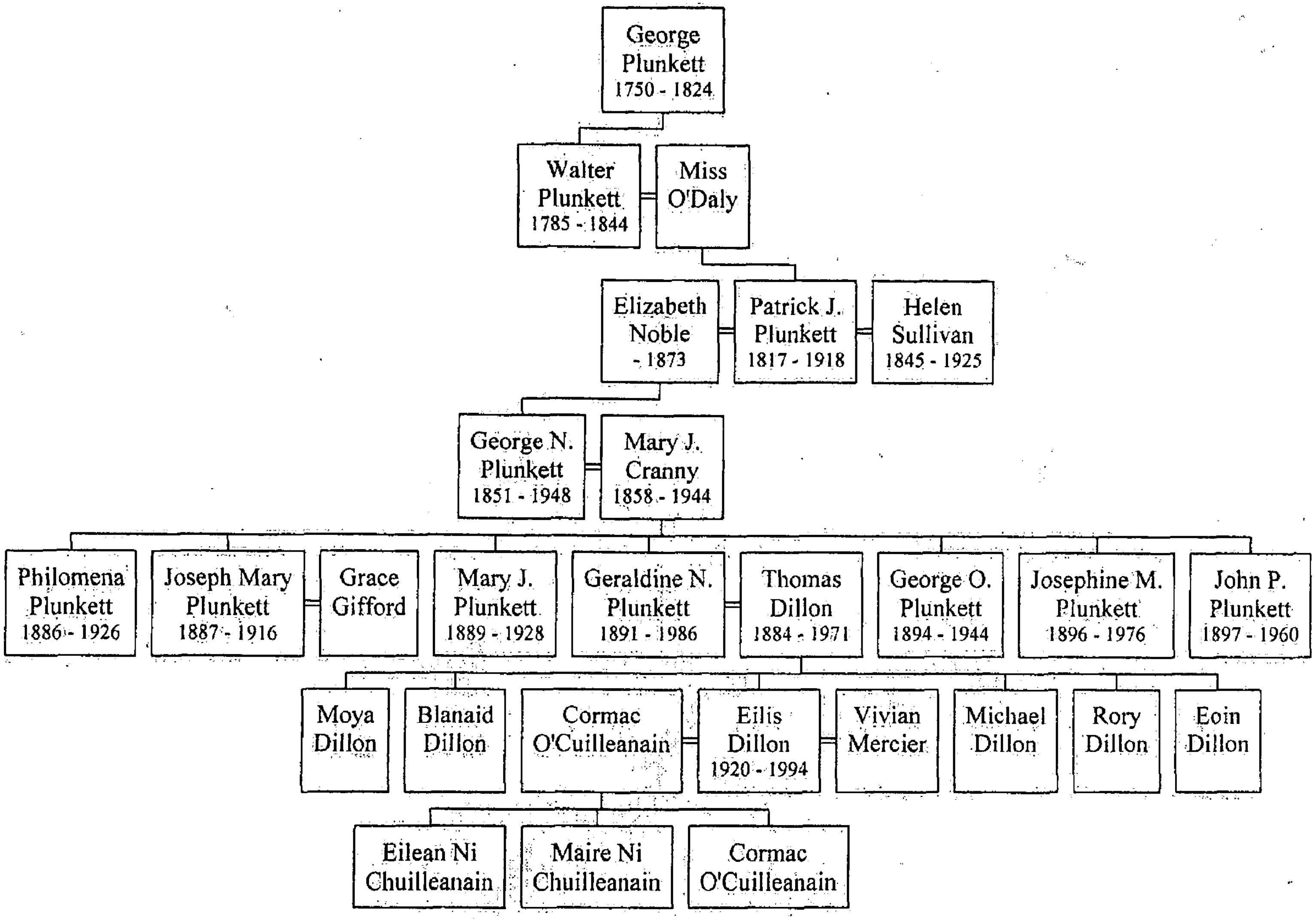
Family Trees

Plunkett Family

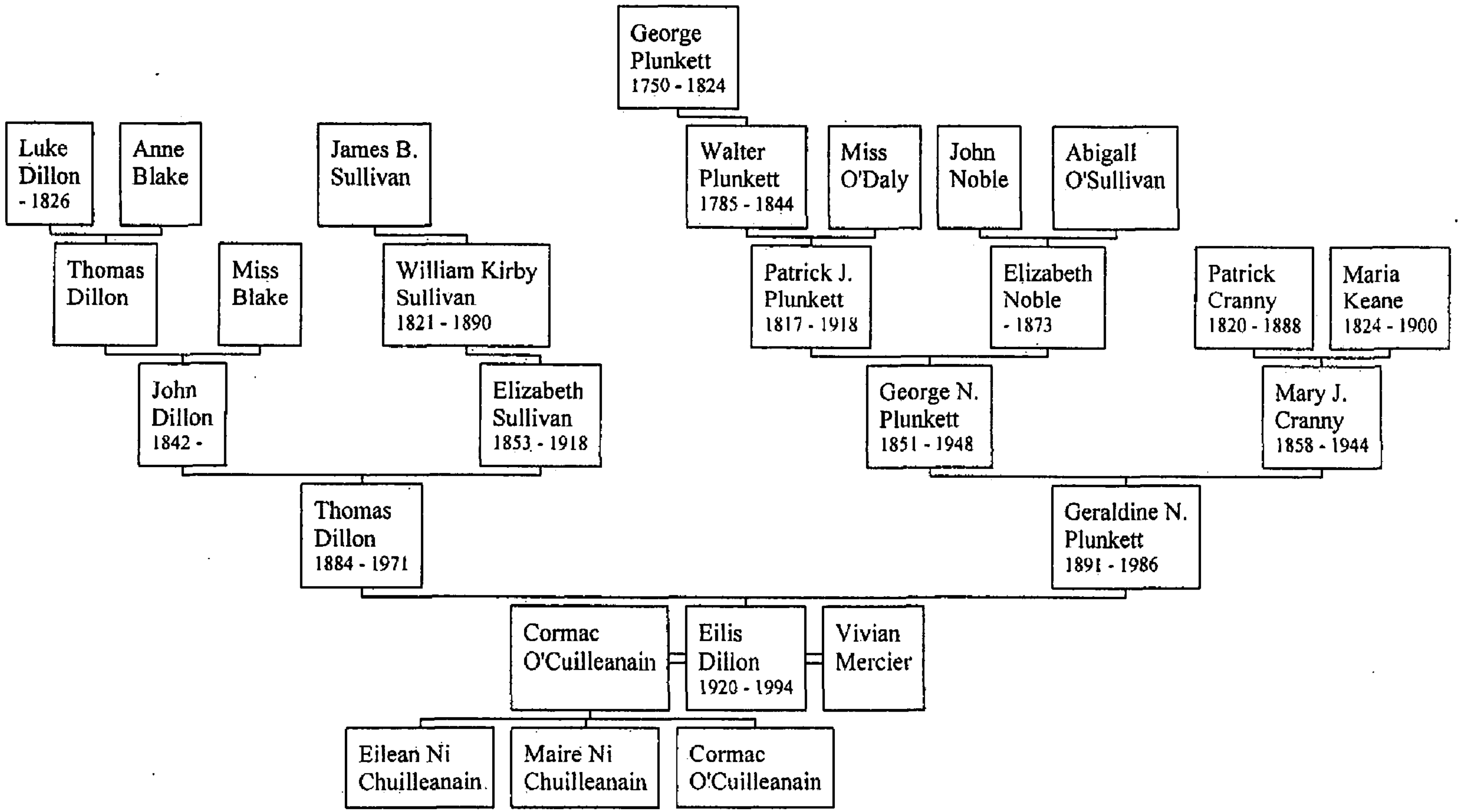
Dillon Family

Eilís Dillon

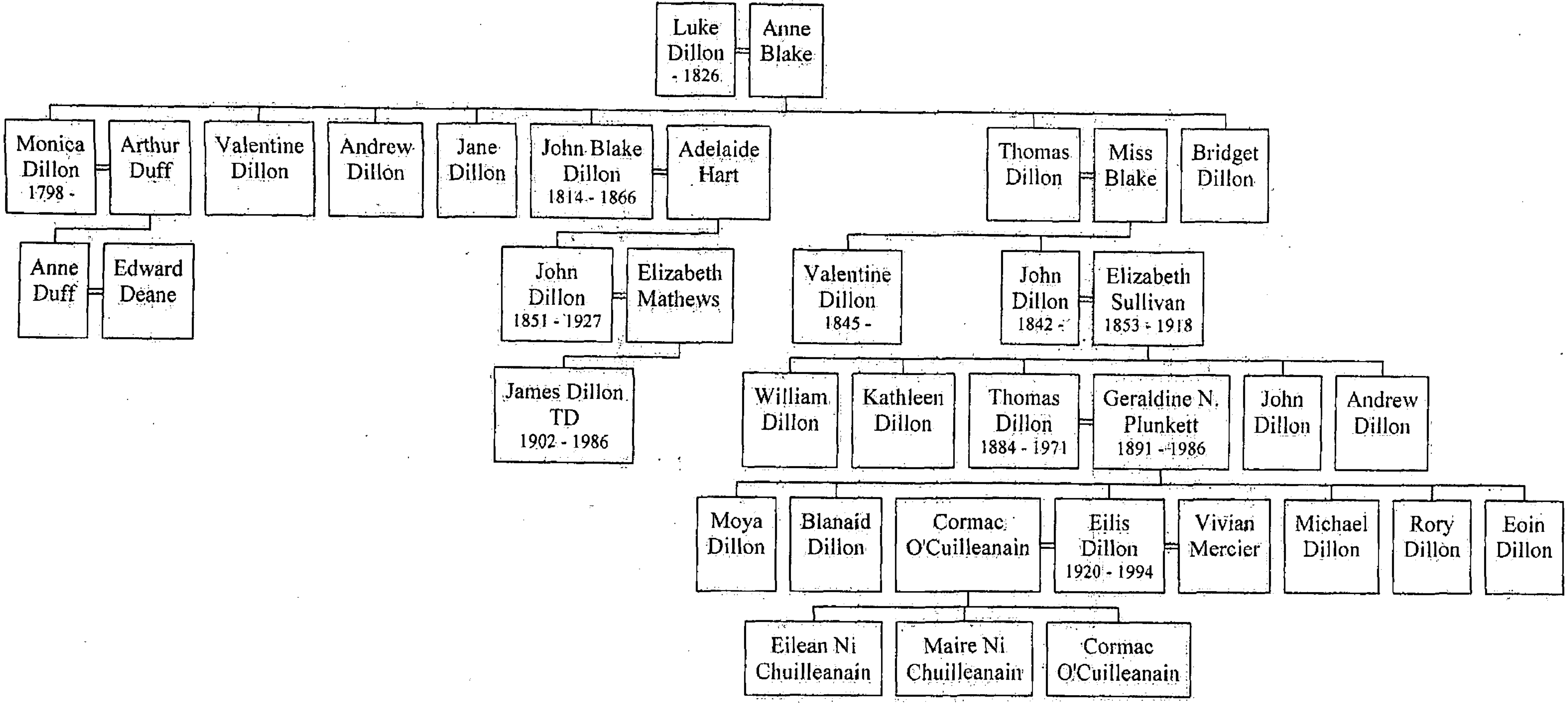
Plunkett Family Tree


George Plunkett 1750 - 1824
Walter Plunkett 1785 - 1844
Miss O'Daly
Elizabeth Noble - 1873
Patrick J. Plunkett 1817 - 1918
Helen Sullivan 1845 - 1925
George N. Plunkett 1851 - 1948
Mary J. Cranny 1858 - 1944
Philomena Plunkett 1886 - 1926
Joseph Mary Plunkett 1887 - 1916
Grace Gifford
Mary J. Plunkett 1889 - 1928
Geraldine N. Plunkett 1891 - 1986
Thomas Dillon 1884 - 1971
George O. Plunkett 1894 - 1944
Josephine M. Plunkett 1896 - 1976
John P. Plunkett 1897 - 1960
Moya Dillon
Blanaid Dillon
Cormac O'Cuilleanain
Eilis Dillon 1920 - 1994
Vivian Mercier
Michael Dillon
Rory Dillon
Eoin Dillon
Eilean Ni Chuilleanain
Maire Ni Chuilleanain
Cormac O'Cuilleanain

Family Tree of Eilis Dillon


George Plunkett 1750 - 1824
Luke Dillon - 1826
Anne Blake
James B. Sullivan
Walter Plunkett 1785 - 1844
Miss O'Daly
John Noble
Abigall O'Sullivan
Thomas Dillon
Miss Blake
William Kirby Sullivan 1821 - 1890
Patrick J. Plunkett 1817 - 1918
Elizabeth Noble - 1873
Patrick Cranny 1820 - 1888
Maria Keane 1824 - 1900
John Dillon 1842 -
Elizabeth Sullivan 1853 - 1918
George N. Plunkett 1851 - 1948
Mary J. Cranny 1858 - 1944
Thomas Dillon 1884 - 1971
Geraldine N. Plunkett 1891 - 1986
Cormac O'Cuilleanain
Eilis Dillon 1920 - 1994
Vivian Mercier
Eilean Ni Chuilleanain
Maire Ni Chuilleanain
Cormac O'Cuilleanain

Dillon Family Tree


Luke Dillon - 1826
Anne Blake
Monica Dillon 1798 -
Arthur Duff
Valentine Dillon
Andrew Dillon
Jane Dillon
John Blake Dillon 1814 - 1866
Adelaide Hart
Thomas Dillon
Miss Blake
Bridget Dillon
Anne Duff
Edward Deane
John Dillon 1851 - 1927
Elizabeth Mathews
Valentine Dillon 1845 -
John Dillon 1842 -
Elizabeth Sullivan 1853 - 1918
James Dillon TD 1902 - 1986
William Dillon
Kathleen Dillon
Thomas Dillon 1884 - 1971
Geraldine N. Plunkett 1891 - 1986
John Dillon
Andrew Dillon
Moya Dillon
Blanaid Dillon
Cormac O'Cuilleanain
Eilis Dillon 1920 - 1994
Vivian Mercier
Michael Dillon
Rory Dillon
Eoin Dillon
Eilean Ni Chuilleanain
Maire Ni Chuilleanain
Cormac O'Cuilleanain

Appendix C

A Reading List for Children

This list was compiled by Eilís Dillon to accompany a lecture to Dublin City Librarians, Summer 1963.

This document was transcribed in its entirety from National Library of Ireland, Eilís Dillon Papers, Collection No.41, Ms 33337. The items are produced here as they appear in the original document, without full citations or bibliographic conventions.

Age 7
The Heroes - Charles Kingsley
Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales
The Andrew Lang Fairy Books
The Story of Doctor Doolittle, Doctor Doolittle's Zoo etc.- Hugh Lofting.
The Wind in the Willows- Kenneth Grahame
Winnie the Pooh- A.A. Milne
The House at Pooh Corner A.A. Milne
The Golden Geography
The Golden Astronomy
The Adventure of Till Eulenspiegal
When we were very young A.A. Milne
A Child's Garden of Verses- R.L. Stevenson
The Arabian Nights Entertainments
Book of Nonsense- Edward Lear
Pinnochio- Collodi

Age 8
Grimm's Fairy Tales
Treasure Island- R.L. Stevenson
The Midnight Folk- John Masefield
The Box of Delights- John Masefield
Swallows and Amazons, Swallowdale etc- Arthur Ransome
Poems: The Ancient Mariner- Coleridge
Lepanto – G.K. Chesterton
The Turf- Cutter's Donkey- Patricia Lynch
Long Ears- Patricia Lynch
King of the Tinkers- Patricia Lynch
The Turf- Cutter's Donkey goes Visiting- Patricia Lynch
The Borrowers-Mary Norton
The Borrowers Afield-Mary Norton
The Borrowers Afloat-Mary Norton
The Borrowers Aloft-Mary Norton
The 101 Dalmations- Dodie Smith
Five Children and It, The Story of the Amulet etc. E. Nesbit
The Wheel on the School- Meindert Dejong
Perrault's Fairy Tales
Aesop's Fables
Wurzel Gummidge etc.- Barbara Euphen Todd
The Faun and the Woodcutter's Daughter- Barbara Leonie Picard
The Mermaid and the Simpleton- Barbara Leonie Picard
Celtic Fairy Tales- Jacob
Poems:
The Bad Child's Book of Beasts- Hilaire Belloc
Cautionary Tales etc. Hilaire Belloc
The Hunting of the Snark- Lewis Carroll
The Princess and the Goblin- George MacDonald

Age 9
David Copperfield- Charles Dickens
Oliver Twist- Charles Dickens
Pickwick Papers- Charles Dickens
NOT Nicholas Nickleby
Little Women- Louisa M Alcott
The Wide Wide World- Elizabeth Weatherall
What Katy Did -Susan Cooper
What Katy Did at School- Susan Cooper
What Katy Did Next- Susan Cooper
The Oxford Junior Companion to Music – Percy Scholes
The Musician's Nephew- C.S.Lewis
The Swiss Family Robinson
The Little Book-Room- Eleanor Farjeon
Collected Stories- Walter de la Mare
Collected Poems- Walter de la Mare
Kidnapped- RL Stevenson
Caitriona - RL Stevenson
A Midsummer Night's Dream- Shakespeare
As You Like It- Shakespeare
The Merchant of Venice - Shakespeare
Family on one-End Street- Eve Garnett
Jungle Book- Kipling
Just so Stories- Kipling
The King of Ireland's Son- Padraic Colum
Irish Fairy Tales – James Stephens
Wind on the Moon- Eric Linklater
Story of Ireland- A.M. Sullivan
Water Babies- Charles Kingsley
Secret Garden- F.H. Burnett

Age 10
Tom Brown's Schooldays- Hughes
Our Exploits of West Poley- Thomas Hardy
Martin Hyde- John Masefield
Jim Davis- John Masefield
The Crock of Gold- James Stephens
The Demigods- James Stephens
Irish Sagas and Folk Tales- Eileen Ó Faoláin
A Swordsman of the Brigade- Michael O' Hanrahan
The Oxford Book of Modern Verse
The Merry Wives of Windsor- Shakespeare
The Tempest- Shakespeare
Stories of Famous Operas (Fontana Press)
Tarka the Otter- Henry Williamson
Mister Jim- Rutherford Montgomery
The Lost Island- Eilís Dillon
The San Sebastian- Eilís Dillon
The House on the Shore -Eilís Dillon
The Singing Cave- Eilís Dillon
The Island of Horses- Eilís Dillon
The Fort of Gold- Eilís Dillon
The Bible (beginning at the beginning)
Gulliver's Travels- Jonathan Swift
Man must Measure- Lancelot Hogben
Huckleberry Finn- Mark Twain
Tom Sawyer- Mark Twain
A Hundred Million Francs- Paul Berna

Age 11
The Graves at Kilmorna- Canon Sheehan
My New Curate- Canon Sheehan
The Blindness of Doctor Grey - Canon Sheehan
Jane Eyre- Bronte
Agnes Grey- Bronte
Wuthering Heights-Bronte
The Mill on the Floss- George Eliot
Poems of Three Brontes
Jail Journal- John Mitchel
Companions of Fortune- Rene Guillot
Kpo the Leopard- Rene Guillot
Wild Animals I have Known- Ernest xxx
The Coral Island- R.M. Ballantyne
The Wonderful Adventures of Nils- Selma Lagerlof
The Further Adventures of Nils- Selma Lagerlof
The Forest Lovers- Maurice Hewlet
Richard Yea and Nay- Maurice Hewlet
The Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics

Age 12
The Screwtape Letters- C.S.Lewis
Plays of JM Synge
The Playboy
Riders to the Sea
Deirdre
The Well of the Saints
The Rising- Desmond Ryan
Pride and Prejudice- Jane Austin
Northanger Abbey Jane Austin
Emma Jane Austin
Persuasion Jane Austin
Framley Parsonage- Anthony Trollope
Meet Mr. Mulliner, Mr. Mulliner Speaking- PG Wodehouse
New Arabian Nights- R.L. Stevenson
The Odyssey (Penguin Classics translation)
The Iliad
On Music and Musicians- John Schumann
Huntingtower – John Buchan
The Thirty-Nine Steps- John Buchan
Greenmantle etc. –John Buchan
Sard Harker- John Masefield
Odta- John Masefield
Captain Margaret- John Masefield
The Hawbucks- John Masefield
The Bird of Dawning- John Masefield
Murder in the Cathedral - T.S.Eliot
Julius Caesar- **all** Shakespeare
Master Musician Series- Lives of Composers
Grey's History of Music etc.
Outline of Art edited by Orpen
Outline of Literature edited by John Drinkwater
Castle Rackrent- Maria Edgeworth (also The Parent's Assistant and any others available)
The Vicar of Wakefield- Oliver Goldsmith
The Oxford Book of Irish Verse
Twenty Years a Growing- M. O' Sullivan
Peig- Peig Sayers
Tacitus on Britain and Germany- Penguin

Age 13
The Father Brown Stories – G.K.Chesterton
The Man who was Thursday- G.K.Chesterton
The Flying Inn -G.K.Chesterton
The Napoleon of Notting Hill -G.K.Chesterton
The History of Mr. Polly- HG Wells
Poems:
Yeats Poems
The Ballad of Reading Gaol- Wilde
Salome- Oscar Wilde
The Picture of Dorian Gray- Wilde
Deirdre- James Stephens
The Charwoman's Daughter- James Stephens
Here are the Ladies -James Stephens
Death comes for the Archbishop- Willa Cather
The Song of the Lark- Willa Cather
Plays of Seán O'Casey
Plays of Pinero
Plays of Pirandelle
The Warden- Anthony Trollope
Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.- Somerville and Ross
Essays of G.K. Chesterton
Essays of Bacon
Saint Joan- G.B. Shaw
Plays Pleasant- G.B. Shaw
Plays Unpleasnt- G.B. Shaw
Peer Gynt- Ibsen
The Count of Monte Cristo- A.Dumas
The Three Musketeers- A. Dumas
Les Miserables- Victor Hugo
Summer Half- August Folly, etc. Angela Thirkell
Cranford- Mrs. Gaskell
Penguin New Dictionary of Music
Our Lady of Fatima- William Thomas
All Books by Robert Gibbings

Age 14
Modern Irish Short Stories Edited by
A Composer's Eleven- Nevill Cardus
The Seven Story Mountain- Thomas Merton
Guerilla Days in Ireland- Tom Barry
On Another Man's Wound- Ernie O'Malley
A Book of Ireland edited by Frank O' Connor
Ibsen: Plays
DonQuixote- Penguin Classics
A Room with a View- E.M. Forster
Where Angels Fear to Tread- E.M. Forster
Trent's Last Case- E.C. Bentley
The Riddle of the Sands- Erskine Childers
Poems; The Hound of Heaven – Francis Thompson
Novels of Joseph Conrad
Eugenie Grandet- Balzac
Talking of Music- Nevill Cardus
Biography of Kathleen Ferrier- W. Ferrier
Faust-Goethe
The Eagle and the Dove- V. Sackville West
Wild Wales- George Borrow
Vanity Fair- Thackeray
Henry Esmond- Thackeray
Saint Joan- V. Sackville West

Saint Joan- Péguy
Screwtape Letters- C.S. Lewis
Ariel (Life of Shelley) A. Maurois
The Little Flowers of St. Francis
Plays of Yeats
The Last Days of Pompeii- Lord Lytton
Eminent Victorians- Lytton Strachey
The Reason Why- Cecil Woodham Smith
Florence Nightengale- Cecil Woodham Smith
Stories for Girls- Kathleen Lines (Faber)
The 'Sunday Times' and the 'Observer' every week.

Age 15
War and Peace- Leo Tolstoy
Gone with the Wind- Margaret Mitchell
Byron in Italy- Peter Quennell (check
Son of Oscar Wilde- Vyvyan Holland
Art and Scholasticism- Jacques Maritain
Mr. Perrin and Mr. Prail- Hugh Walpole
The Art of Writing-A.Quiller Couch
The Bridge of San Luis Rey- Thornton Wilder
The Ides of March- Thornton Wilder
The Gentleman from Indiana- Booth Tarkington
The Islands of Ireland- Thomas Mason
Complete Works of P.H. Pearse
Literature in Ireland –Thomas Mac Donagh
Synge and Anglo- Irish literature- Daniel Corkery
The Threshold of Quiet- Daniel Corkery
The Hidden Ireland- Daniel Corkery
Shadows of the Rock- Will Cather
Evelina- Fanny Burney
Journal to Stella- Jonathan Swift
Poems of John Donne- Penguin

Age 16
Alexander Pope- Edith Sitwell
Crime and Punishment- F Dostoevsky
The Brothers Karamazov –F. Dostoevsky
Plays of Chekov
Dead Souls- Gogol
Anna Karenin- Tolstoi
Plays of Sophocles and Aeschuslus
Madame Bovary- Flaubert
Scarlet and Black-Stendhal
Bach- A. Schweitzer
Herodotus Histories – Penguin Classics
Appollonnius of Rhodes– Penguin Classics
Plays by Moliere
Divine Comedy- Dante
Biography of Ferdinand and Isabella
Old Goriot- Balzac
The Borgia Pope Alexander VI
Poems of W. H. Auden
The Great O' Neill – Seán Ó Faoláin
The Quest for Corvo- A.J.A.Symons

Age 17
Tristram Shandy- Laurence Sterne
Tom Jones- Henry Fielding
Black Mischief- Evelyn Waugh

Decline and Fall- - Evelyn Waugh
Brideshead Revisited- Evelyn Waugh
Osbert Sitwell-Autobiography
Under Milkwood – Dylan Thomas
Jurgen- James Branch Cabell
Metamorphoses of Ovid

Appendix D

Email from Faber & Faber

from **Robert Brown** RobertB@faber.co.uk
to Anne-Marie Herron <amherron@gmail.com>

date Fri, Jan 14, 2011 at 10:41 AM
subject RE: PhD Eilis Dillon

Dear Anne Marie Herron

Although there will be material about Eilis Dillon in the archive here, we are unfortunately not able at the moment to offer access to scholarly researchers. The archive has been locked away for many years, and we have only just begun to catalogue it and undertake necessary re-boxing and conservation. I am afraid this situation is unlikely to change for the next few years. Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Robert Brown

The Tyranny of the Past? Revolution, Retrospection and Remembrance in the work of Irish writer Eilís Dillon

Volume II

"The Published Work of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations"

http://research.dho.ie/dillon/

Anne Marie Herron

THESIS ABSTRACT

The digital project *The Published Work of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations* is presented in part fulfilment of the PhD thesis, *The Tyranny of the Past? Revolution, Retrospection and Remembrance in the work of Irish writer Eilís Dillon.* It was developed in collaboration with fellow students Gaye Ashford and Teresa O'Donnell and in conjunction with St Patrick's College Drumcondra, a College of Dublin City University (DCU) and with *An Foras Feasa*. The written component is presented in this volume (Volume II) of the PhD thesis.

This volume of the dissertation sets the digital project in the overall context of the digital humanities and presents a rationale for its inclusion in the thesis. While extensive reference is made to this particular study, this volume also presents a formal methodology outlining the shared development applied to the three digital PhD projects based in three diverse strands of the humanities; eighteenth-century Irish history, twentieth-century Irish literature and twentieth-century Irish music archives.

Although the project as a whole did not achieve all of the desired targets, it proved, nonetheless, to be an insightful and valuable learning experience. This volume examines both the successes and short-comings of the academic, organisational, technological and personal factors that shaped the outcome of the project. It analyses and evaluates the support structures provided by various agencies connected with the PhD programme, the limitations that emerged in relation to it and the challenges that had to be addressed. Based on the experience gained in the course of this study, some observations are offered and suggestions are given for those pursuing similar projects in the area of digital humanities. This collaborative PhD project also opens up the agenda for future opportunities in the scholarly field of the digital humanities, and highlights potential areas for further research into best practice in this area from both organisational and functional perspectives.

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Introduction

We live in a world in which information technology, moving at a progressively rapid pace, has been placed at the very core of the way we communicate, transact our business and function as a society. This is particularly true in academia and is indicated by the increasing proportion of university budgets now reserved to support digital technology initiatives. The value of technology to the fields of science and economics is evident in its creation of sophisticated modelling of data or its use in number crunching, thereby, leading to discoveries or insights that even a decade ago would have been impossible. However, while technology has a role to play in all academic disciplines, the function of information technology within the humanities in Ireland can be ill-defined and nebulous. It is essential, therefore, to examine how new and emerging technologies are being, or could be, used in academic research and writing. The digital element of this project has played an important role in the overall thesis and accompanies, enhances and supports the more traditional aspect of the humanities dissertation published in Volume I. The concept of this thesis is innovative in the Irish context with the cohort of post-graduate students involved being the first to engage in a PhD programme of this type in Ireland.

This volume provides a detailed description of the accompanying digital project *The Published Works of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations,* from its origins and conception to its delivery online, while also outlining the methodologies and processes involved in its creation. It explains the role of the agencies involved and the supports provided by them. It outlines the collaborative approach taken to the study in the context of three individual projects and the decisions made to enable viable collaboration during their creation. It details the approach to the digitisation process and the factors that impinged on its implementation. In particular, it highlights the valuable learning outcomes that emerged through participation in this digitisation initiative and assesses its benefits, while also critically examining any shortfalls in knowledge, expertise and organisation. It considers issues relating to academic assessment and evaluation procedures for this interdisciplinary thesis, as well as the difficulties encountered by students in meeting these demands. Although it is beyond the scope of this volume to examine fully the opportunities for, and extent of, the employment of new technology in the humanities, this case study evaluates the PhD Digital Humanities Programme as it relates to this project and comments on its implications and possible benefits for future similar post-graduate studies.

Origins of the Project

This PhD thesis was undertaken within the Digital Humanities Education Programme of *An Foras Feasa, The Institute for Research in Irish Historical and Cultural Traditions*, an organisation that 'has emerged from pioneering and longstanding partnerships between humanities and computer science researchers at the National University of Ireland Maynooth and its partner institutions'.[1] *An Foras Feasa* takes its name from the title of a history of Ireland, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (c.1634), which translates from the Irish language as the 'Foundation of Knowledge on Ireland' and which was written by Geoffrey Keating[2] (1569–1644), Irish poet and priest. Keating was 'highly influential in forming a national consciousness in Ireland' by 'collecting material from some of the oldest manuscript sources available and evaluating them using the most modern historiographical methods of the time'. *An Foras Feasa:* has similar aims in a current context in that it 'seeks to apply the most modern scholarly and technological resources available to the study of the historical and cultural traditions of this island, including relationships with Europe and with the wider world'.[3] St Patrick's College, along with three other institutions,[4] forms part of a consortium within *An Foras Feasa* that supports individual and collaborative projects in the areas of humanities and technology. Research opportunities for the period 2007–2010 were provided within four streams:

- ICT Innovation and the Humanities
- Multiculturalism and Multilingualism: Textual Analysis and Linguistic Change

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[1] http://www.forasfeasa.ie is the website for An Foras Feasa NUIM.

[2] Irish language name *Seathrún Céitinn*

[3] http://www.forasfeasa.ie

[4] National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM), Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT), St Patrick's College Drumcondra (SPD) as part of Dublin City University (DCU).

- Ireland and Europe: History, Literature and the Cultural Politics of Migration
- Cultural Heritage and Social Capital in a Global Context.

This PhD thesis falls into the third category mentioned above and is also supported under the Higher Education Authority's Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLI) as one of three fellowships granted to St Patrick's College as a member of *An Foras Feasa.*

Since information regarding the published works of Irish writer Eilís Dillon, the subject of the written dissertation, was scattered and incomplete, this researcher chose to create a database that would include the various editions and translations that had been published worldwide. There had hitherto been no complete record of this information and it was intended that collation of this data would allow for an assessment of Dillon's output and of her international success. It would provide information on genres, target readership and themes, as well as track the author's connections to various publishing houses, translators and illustrators at different periods. It was also envisaged that the completed website would provide added value by including related book cover images that would allow researchers to compare the artistic depiction of Dillon's translated works in various cultural settings.

The digitisation of this data aimed to complement the written dissertation presented in Volume I which examines the role of memory in Dillon's writing and the mnemonic function of the printed word. New technologies now allow for other means of recording beyond print, and this digital component aims to play a small part in ensuring that the extent of Dillon's work will be remembered into the future.

A Rationale for this PhD Project

A Brief Outline of Digital Humanities

The development of digital humanities is relatively new in the Irish academic context but the use of information technology within the humanities worldwide has a much longer history, beginning as early as 1946 with the work of an inspirational Jesuit priest. A pioneer in the field, Fr Robert Busa (1913–2011) developed alogorithmic processes for linguistic analysis, thereby 'connecting the dots between informatics and the written word',[5] a process which enabled text searches through vast volumes of ancient literature. His collaboration with Thomas Watson, founder of IBM, eventually resulted in the *Index Thomisticus*, an index of the works of medieval theologian Thomas Acquinas, a collection comprising about nine million words. The project, completed thirty years later, was ground-breaking for its time[6] and 'ushered in a new era of digital humanities'.[7] As Andrea Tornielli, a journalist with *La Stampa* newspaper, summarises:

> If you can read this article, typed using a computer keyboard, it is greatly thanks to him. If PC and notebook have left the typewriter permanently on the sidelines, if we can compose and decompose texts, perform analysis and researches at the click of a mouse, if we increasingly communicate through virtual messages, this is all greatly thanks to him.[8]

Busa's approach was followed in the 1960s by Antonio Ampolli and his application of computer techniques in literary and linguistic research and, more recently, by other well-known literary projects. These include *Project Gutenberg*[9] (1971), the first single collection of free electronic books, the *Trésor de la Langue Francaise* (1982),[10] which provided access to a large collection of digitised French literary resources and *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* which digitised Greek literary texts from Homer to the fall of Byzantium.[11] Such academic achievements made possible the popular applications of e-books and other electronic media. With the development of the *Million Book Project*,[12] *Google Books*[13] and Amazon's *Search Inside*[14] initiatives, more than one million books in the English language are searchable online by the ever-growing individuals and communities with access to computers and the internet. All of these initiatives have been converging towards an ideal articulated by United States former President Bill Clinton in his 1998 State of the Union Address, of an America 'where every child can stretch a hand across a keyboard and reach every book ever written, every painting ever painted, every symphony ever composed'.[15] Since that speech, made during the height of a technology boom, the implications of which were still unclear, that dream has become a reality in many places, thanks to the breadth and scope of what Julia Flanders terms 'technological progressivism'.[16] Humanities scholarship has been sharing in this sense of progress.

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[5] Dr Ernesto Priego, "One academic's impact on HE and my career", Guardian Professional [London], http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/aug/12/father-roberto-busa-academic-impact, 25 Sept. 2011.

[6] http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age;jsessionid=69BCAEA0B4FDA82406A652828B3052C4 consists of 56 printed volumes, now produced on CD Rom and on the web.

[7] Dr Ernesto Priego, "One academic's impact on HE and my career", Guardian Professional [London], http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/aug/12/father-roberto-busa-academic-impact, 25 Sept. 2011.

[8] Andrea Tornielli, "Fr Busa, the Jesuit priest who invented the hypertext" La Stampa [Rome] 25 Sept. 2011, http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/documents/detail/articolo/web-busa-6893/

Computers have for some time been seen 'as part of the tissue of the world' of study[17] with the use of the internet and online journals, and there is an expectation that what scholars want to read or learn will be easily available to them electronically, and at any hour.[18] As the report from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) on 'Cyber-infrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences' has noted, the internet has radically 'transformed the practice of the humanities and social sciences'.[19] As more personal, social and professional time is spent online, it is becoming increasingly important to have an 'online environment that cultivates the richness of human experience, the diversity of human languages and cultures, and the full range of human creativity'.[20] Scholars in all disciplines have adapted to the use of various digital tools to enhance their study and have availed for some time of analytical software, databases, electronic manuscripts, texts and websites. However, John Unsworth (2002) distinguishes between using the computer for its many practical purposes and 'humanities computing' which involves using it as a tool for modelling humanities data and our understanding of it.[21] Patrik Svensson summarises Willard McCarthy's (2005) three denotations of this development as moving through the stages from 'computers *and* the humanities' when the relationship was desired but largely unrealised, via 'computing *in* the humanities' when entry has been gained and, '*humanities computing*' [my itals] of the final 'confident but enigmatic stage'.[22] Svennson also explains that the term 'humanities computing' is now more usually replaced by the term 'digital humanities' as a more inclusive description for the wide range of activities involved.

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[9] http://www.gutenberg.org

[10] ARTFL Project http://humanities.uchichago.edu/orgs/ARTFL/ "Trésor de la Langue Française" is freely accessible on the site of the ATILF laboratory: http://www.inalf.fr/tlfi

[11] http://www.tlg.uci.edu/

[12] http://www.archive.org/details/millionbooks

[13] http://books.google.com

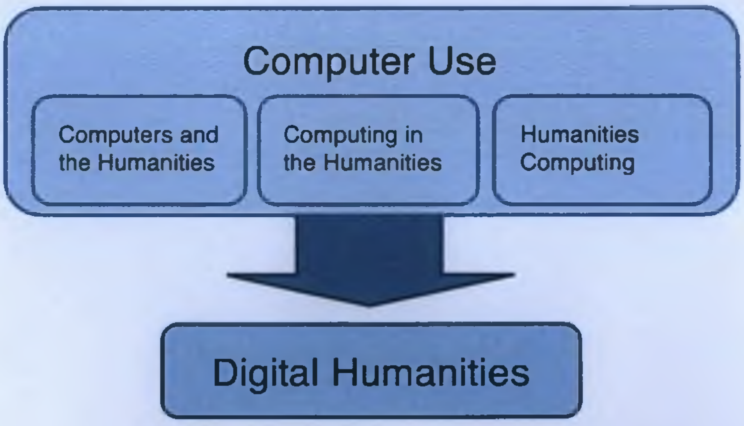
[14] http://www.amazon.com/Search-Inside-Book-Books/b?ie=UTF8&node=10197021 Microsoft discontinued plans for its *Books Live* digitisation project in 2008.

[15] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/special/states/docs/sou98.htm

[16] Julia Flanders, "The productive unease of 21st century digital scholarship", *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Summer 2009, Vol. 3, No. 3. http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/3/000055/000055.html [30 Mar. 2010].

[17] Flanders, 'The productive unease of 21st century digital scholarship'.

[18] Flanders, 'The productive unease of 21st century digital scholarship'.



The world of digital humanities has been described as a 'new cultural commonwealth in which knowledge, learning, and discovery can flourish'.[23] While not intentional in its usage, the word common*wealth* [my itals] appears apt in that it can imply a richness of ownership in both the digital and humanities communities, a knowledge which is currently being pooled for the benefit of all. Humanities resources, combined with computer networks and software tools are increasingly shaping the way scholars explore, discover and make sense of 'the human record', and at the same time shape the way their findings are communicated.[24] The humanities community contributes and benefits from this new merger. Humanities scholars, with their tried and tested aptitude to engage in 'clarity of expression', their ability to 'uncover meaning, even in scattered or garbled information' and 'centuries of experience in organizing knowledge', not only have much to offer to the process but also have much to gain in knowledge gleaned from computer scientists who can make technological dreams a reality.[25]

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[19] American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) *Our Cultural Commonwealth.* http://www.acls.org/cyberinfrastructure/ourculturalcommonwealth.pdf [15 Mar.2010].

[20] ACLS, *Our Cultural Commonwealth.*

[21] In Flanders, 'The productive unease of 21st century digital scholarship'.

[22] Patrik Svennson, *Humanities computing as Digital Humanities* http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/3/000065/000065ml [30 Mar. 2010]

[23] ACLS, *Our Cultural Commonwealth.*

Benefits of Digitisation to the Humanities

With recently developed and ever-changing technological advances, the application of computing in the humanities has become more attractive and useful to scholarship. Flanders argues that the increased speed and computing power now available has 'given us tools that finally propel us over the threshold of possibility'.[26] She further suggests that modern text encoding tools are 'good enough and fast enough' to allow novices to master them for their own purposes. For example, digitisation serves a number of functions for scholars and the general public by:

- preserving records in the interests of posterity
- presenting fully-searchable texts
- making available fully-searchable catalogues, databases and indexes
- creating tools for spatial analysis of data and visualisation
- facilitating data modelling
- enabling direct publishing online and subsequent peer review
- encouraging collaboration, sharing of information and transferral of data.

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[24] ACLS, *Our Cultural Commonwealth.*

[25] ACLS, *Our Cultural Commonwealth.*

[26] Flanders.

Digitisation tools can satisfy the demands of the wide range of humanities disciplines which include anthropology, classics, language, literature, history, music, philosophy, theology, and the performing and visual arts to name but a few. These areas of study span the history of the universe, deal with theories and artefacts that are new or are thousands of years old and benefit from presentation through, and within, a variety of media such as text, image, sound, spatial and digital data. As the field broadens and more data is discovered, increasingly complex and adaptable methods of storage, presentation and accessibility are required. Digital technologies offer humanities students 'new methods of conducting research, conceptualising relationships, and presenting scholarship',[27] thereby enhancing research and facilitating understanding, presentation and communication of a topic or issue. New developments have led to a widespread interest among scholars of the potential that digital humanities offers and as a result, more avenues of funding are being made available for the fulfilment of digital humanities initiatives across all disciplines. Excellent examples of Irish and international collaborative projects are available on a variety of sites, among them; the TAPoR[28] text analysis portal, the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* site,[29] *The Godwin Diary site* of the Oxford/Bodlian Library[30], the fully searchable *Irish Legislation*[31] database hosted by Queen's University Belfast, *The Irish Census* online database[32] and the *Women in Modern Irish Culture*[33] database, a collaborative work of the University of Warwick and University College Dublin and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Online reference works such as encyclopædias, historical, etymological and bilingual dictionaries, references and grammars are all research tools of major importance to the humanities scholar.[34] Equally, the creation and online provision of fully searchable descriptive catalogues such as those of the National Library of

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[27] www.neh.gov [30 Mar. 2010]

[28] http://tapor.mcmaster.ca/html/research_01.html

[29] http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/

[30] http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/index2.html

[31] http://www.qub.ac.uk/ild/?func=help&section=sources [17 July. 2010].

[32] http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/; http://www.1901censusonline.com/; http://www.scottishdocuments.com/All of these sites allow researchers access to digitised versions of primary source documents online.

[33] www.arts-humanities.net/projects/women_niderb_irish_culture [11 Aug. 2010].

[34] For example see Dictionary of Irish Biography (Ireland) http://dib.cambridge.org/

Ireland holdings[35] and of the British Library[36] have proved of enormous benefit to researchers at local and global levels, allowing them to allocate and direct their often limited resources in the most useful and productive direction. Digital humanities projects have also fostered the creation of tools for spatial analysis and representation of humanities data through the use of databases and electronic archives that codify or integrate humanities materials.[37] The provision and application of such digital tools facilitates the development of humanities resources and enables the sharing and exchange of humanities information, thereby prompting researchers to partake in, and contribute to, larger projects in a globalised digital environment. Digitisation projects, irrespective of the discipline to which they are attached, should be designed primarily to advance and accelerate this sharing and and easy exchange of relevant data.[38] As Unsworth states, on the one hand they must be 'shaped by the need for efficient computation' and, on the other, 'for human communication'.[39] What is important is that digitisation should provide scholars with the ability to organise and research their material in a way that 'satisfies the scholarly criteria of each of the humanities disciplines which have both commonalities and differences'.[40] But while diversity exists to approaches within the humanities, Unsworth[41] has identified the common skills or 'primitives' that form the basis for study as:

Discovering ***Annotation*** ***Comparing***
Referring ***Sampling*** ***Illustrating***
Representing

---

[35] www.nli.ie
[36] http://www.bl.uk/
[37] Mapping Death http://mappingdeath.ie/ A study of burials in Ireland 1st– 8th centuries AD
[38] neh.gov [accessed 30 Mar. 2010].
[39] in Flanders
[40] Martyn Jessop, *The growth and development of humanities computing.* http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/views/v5i41_jessop.html
[41] Jessop, *The growth and development of humanities computing.*

The result is a 'methodological commons' of computational techniques shared among the humanities disciplines.[42] These include database design, text analysis, numerical analysis, data imaging, information retrieval and communication. The primary task of digital humanities is, according to Jessop, 'to provide the technological tools to allow academics to apply these primitives to the range of digital data and resources available across computer networks and to ensure the viability of these resources into the future'.[43]

The aim is not to replace traditional scholarship but to complement its methodology. Although computers can make research easier, they cannot replace the sort of questioning and critical analysis that is unique to the human brain. As Michael Lesk notes, computer programmes can count the number of times words or phrases appear in an author's work and display them in enhanced, graphic, digitised formats such as 'word clouds', but they are unable to 'discuss the sources of an author's inspiration or the relationship of somebody's texts to contemporary culture.'[44] Lesk summarises it as follows: 'Today computers can count; they can read a little, see a little, hear a little, and feel a little. But as yet they do not read, see, hear, or feel at the levels needed to provide insights for humanities scholars'.[45]

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[42] Jessop, *The Growth and Development of Humanities Computing.*

[43] Jessop, *The Growth and Development of Humanities Computing.*

[44] Michael Lesk, *From Data to Wisdom: Humanities research and online content.* http://www.academiccommons.org/commons/essay/michael-lesk [accessed 25 Mar. 2010]

[45] Lesk, *From Data to Wisdom.*

Methodology for the Development of a Collaborative Project

Digital Humanities - A Collaborative Approach

Collaborative research is now 'the most common way in which research is conducted in the sciences whether experimental or theoretical'.[46] Many science projects are commonly co-funded by international bodies, executed by teams of researchers and co-authored by groups. However, this has not been as common within the area of the humanities where most work is completed by individuals. But new patterns have emerged, even within what Walsh and Kahn call 'the traditional domain of the lone scholar at work in the archive or library'.[47] They point to the breaching of established academic divides that have been initiated by shifts in funding regulations and institutional agendas and they welcome the ensuing merging of the talents of 'humanities-savvy techies and techie-savvy scholars in the humanities'.[48] Since 1996, Romantic Circles[49] has built an online community focused on Romanticism, 'not only fostering communication among researchers but also collaboratively developing content'.[50] *The Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship* (NINES) has also built a community that supports digital scholarship and helps 'to legitimize and recognize emerging scholarly forms' by providing suitable training and content, and by developing software.[51] Digital humanities is by its nature interdisciplinary, and collaboration is now considered as both a critical and desirable element for the development of many projects. Specialists working together as a team bring a variety of skills and expertise that a single, unaided scholar might find challenging to attain in order to bring projects to completion. As Lisa Spiro, researcher of collaborative authorship, notes:

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[46] Lorriane Walsh and Peter E. Kahn *Collaborative Working in Higher Education*, 56. http://books.google.com/books?id=WGZlqK5fP9oC&pg=PA56&dq=collaborative+working+in+humanities&hl=en&ei=AyllTdKBMs6YhQfV_8zGBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=collaborative%20working%20in%20humanities&f=false [25 Feb. 2011].

[47] Walsh and Kahn 56.

[48] Walsh and Kahn 56.

[49] http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/

[50] Lisa Spiro, *Collaborative Authorship in the Humanities* (2009), http://digitalscholarship.wordpress.com/2009/04/21/collaborative-authorship-in-the-humanities [30 Mar. 2010].

[51] Spiro, *Collaborative authorship in the humanities.*

> Building digital collections, creating software, devising new analytical methods, and authoring multimodal scholarship cannot be accomplished by a single scholar; rather digital humanities projects require contributions from people with content knowledge, technical skills, project management experience, metadata expertise, etc.[52]

Spiro cites an initiative by the Massachusetts Library Association in 2000 to consider alternatives to the 'adversarial academy' that would encourage collaborative scholarship and she quotes Ede and Lunsford's view that collaborative authorship can lead to a 'widening of scholarly possibilities'.[53] Spiro also recognises the 'genuine enthusiasm' that such co-operation engenders – an enthusiasm that allows scholars and researchers to engage in a wider community, to consider perspectives that differ from their own and to undertake ambitious projects that require a diverse range of skills and or knowledge.[54] The enabling of collaborative processes was identified as a key feature of 'the humanities cyber-infrastructure', in the previously cited ACLS report, *Our Cultural Commonwealth*.[55]

Institutional Supports and Collaboration

The digital projects at the centre of these PhD studies together form a model of collaboration between individuals and between agencies. As previously discussed, multi-institutional co-operation was seminal to this study in terms of funding and support structures. Specific support was provided by *An Foras Feasa* with a series of seminars that explained the role and potential of digital humanities and also introduced students to the wide range of projects undertaken under this umbrella discipline. Advice and guidance regarding digital projects that might prove appropriate to the individual humanities projects were also provided. The seminars afforded opportunities for discussion and developed a sense of collegiality among the participants. The Deans of Research at St Patrick's College[56] were instrumental in helping their three digital humanities students to find common ground and in encouraging them to form an intellectual kinship. With great insight they proposed and supported the collaborative approach and facilitated co-operation with agencies and individuals who provided guidance and expertise which led to the successful completion of the digital aspect of the three individual theses. Students were also encouraged and funded to attend summer schools provided by the Digital Humanites Observatory, an organisation of the Royal Irish Academy, which manages and coordinates the increasingly complex e-resources created in the arts and humanities, and promotes research and development in the area of digital resources.[57]

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[52] Lisa Spiro, *Collaborative Authorship in the Humanities.*
[53] Spiro, *Collaborative Authorship in the Humanities.*
[54] Spiro, *Collaborative Authorship in the Humanities.*
[55] http://www.acls.org/cyberinfrastructure/ourculturalcommonwealth.pdf
[56] Dr Mary Shine Thompson retired August 2010, Dr Ciarán Mac Murchaidh is Dean since September 2010.

Selection of the Digital Project

Following lengthy discussion with Dr Mary Shine Thompson of St Patrick's College, it was agreed that a collaborative approach would be the most efficient way to bring the three projects to fruition. Although each of the three topics associated with this PhD was located in its own humanities field, namely history, music and literature, it was essential to find a common strategy in choosing a digital humanities project suited to all. The intention was that each digital component would benefit from collaboration and, by extension, the process would enhance and develop the skills set of each student. Advantages would accrue in terms of time saving and the sharing of knowledge and aptitudes. The initial difficulty lay in finding direct compatibility between three areas of research. Fortunately, by agreeing to create a database in relation to the individual areas of research, it was possible to approach the projects from a shared technical viewpoint. While there were differences in the scope and scale of the data to be collated, experts in digitisation from the Digital Humanities Observatory provided guidance towards a common mode of data collection and entry, thereby facilitating the use of the same digital tools in creating the databases for each project.

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[57] http://dho.ie/about

Collaboration at Work

Once this major decision had been made, it was possible to formulate a method of working in collaboration and in a spirit of openness. Recognising Doz's (1996) assertion that 'the early stages of cooperation have a disproportionate impact on the long term evolution' of collaborative alliances, our small team of three spent time planning a suitable approach and method of working.[58] Unlike other large-scale collaborative projects which can be challenged by the often unwieldy number of researchers involved, geographical dispersal or a variety of time zones, this small-scale experiment was relatively low risk. Since distance was not an issue, essential face-to-face contact was easily organised and set the tone for the project. This personal approach is seen as the optimal way of working and 'the richest medium for all communication'[59] as it allows for a climate of trust to be built, provides possibilities for immediate feedback and unambiguous responses. Clarification at an early stage can eliminate the misunderstandings that arise from other means of communication, for example by phone or online. As Anandarajan and Anandarajan articulate, these meetings reinforce the working relationship, provide 'the crucial atmosphere of personal obligation', allow the participants to address 'thorny issues', build up social capital 'in tangible ways' and present opportunities 'to reboot the machine' when enthusiasm wanes.[60] The essential ingredients for success as suggested by Kezar (2005) were also in place.[61] These included an eagerness to engage in the project itself and in connected professional dialogue, as well as in social networking. All of this was made easy in that this group was working within a single institution, had a suitable location on campus conducive to group work and ample opportunity for face-to face meetings. In addition, each of the three participants had the 'willingness to persist' and the 'sense of self-efficacy' essential when 'working at the borders of knowledge'.[62] Agreement was quickly reached regarding the following:

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[58] Walsh and Kahn 62.

[59] Muruga Anandarajan, Ashokan Anandarajan, *E-Research Collaboration: Theory, Techniques and Challenges* 37. http://books.google.com/books?id=OAtaB7S6OzMC&pg=PA39&dq=digital+collaboration+in+humanities&hl=en&ei=PiplTevSHZOKhQfw9OGUBw&sa=X&oi=bo

[60] Anandarajan and Anandarajan 42.

[61] in Walsh and Kahn 63.

[62] Walsh and Kahn 68.

- Adoption of a Democratic Approach
- Identification of Individual Strengths
- Acknowledgement of Particular Areas of Knowledge
- Division of Tasks to be Undertaken
- Agreement of Time Frames
- Tools for Tracking Progress
- Arrangements for Regular Communication and Updates

Regular contact was maintained both online and through weekly face-to-face meetings where specific goals were targeted and time frames drafted. Individual roles were defined and assigned with each student opting to develop further a particular vital skill, namely Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) expertise, visualisation development, and an overall understanding of web design. This skills sharing was evidenced in many ways. For example, maximum benefit was achieved by each researcher attending relevant workshops at the Digital Humanities Observatory summer schools and reporting back to the group with a summary of knowledge gleaned and skills developed. In the course of the work, a number of challenges emerged. While the projects shared some similarity, albeit with very varied content, it took time to gain adequate familiarity with the work of two colleagues to enable the harmonisation of methodological approaches. In deciding to share research and writing tasks, there were differences regarding the content to be included and the manner of presenting the agreed content. Some debate centred on the correct citation style when presenting a digital humanities PhD project as each of the three collaborators used a specific style sheet suited to their discipline and recommended by their department. As a result, prior agreement had to be reached on a specific, although hybrid, formatting convention to be adopted by all and best suited to the presentation of the work. This and other issues were dealt with in a fair and reasoned manner to arrive at agreement. In general, the collaboration was extremely successful both professionally and personally and it enhanced greatly the learning experience within the digital humanities. As Wendell Piez notes, the transition for humanities scholars into the digital process should be relatively easy since, if they have been 'lucky', they have been initiated, through their studies, into a world view that is not only critical, 'but tolerant of criticism and therefore capable of vitality, creativity and growth'.[63] Fortunately, this has been the experience within this project.

Electronic Publication Procedures, Editorial Methodology and Encoding Standards

The following three websites were completed within a reasonable time frame and went live on the Digital Humanities Observatory host site on 15 December 2010. They are:

1. *Irish Children in 18th Century Schools and Institutions,* the work of Gaye Ashford. (http://research.dho.ie/children/)
2. *Concert Programmes of the Music Association of Ireland, 1950-1984,* the work of Teresa O'Donnell. (http://research.dho.ie/concerts/)
3. *The Published Works of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations,* the work of this researcher. (http://research.dho.ie/dillon/)

An outline of the procedures involved in the simultaneous creation of the websites is given below.

Planning and Metadata

Although it is impossible to predict every need that digital project designs may be called upon to fulfil or every issue that is likely to arise, careful planning can help to mitigate against any potential problems. A good database is built with forethought and with proper care and attention given to the needs not only of the data that will inhabit it but also to the needs of the end user. With this in mind, an analysis of the documentation and information available to each project was scrutinised in order to isolate and extract the most useful and appropriate data to present as a digital resource that would serve as wide a variety of users as possible. In this instance, the aim was to address those within the literary research community. Extensive consideration was given initially to specific project options regarding the type of software to be used, methods of coding and standardisation, licensing and copyright issues and the development of the website for presentation.

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[63] Wendell Piez, DHO *Something Called "Digital Humanities".* http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/2/2/1/000020/000020.html [30 Mar. 2010].

Closed Vs Open Source Software

Working in collaboration with the Digital Humanities Observatory and with a view to the future and further development of these projects, the use of Open-Source Software (OSS) or Free Open-Source Software (FOSS) was agreed as the most sustainable way forward. OSS or FOSS belong to a type of computer software that is available in source code form for which the source code and certain other rights normally reserved for copyright holders are provided under a software licence that permits users to study, change, and improve the software. FOSS and OSS are distinguishable from commercial or proprietary software in that you cannot see, modify or distribute the later source code.[64] Unlike many proprietary products, FOSS and OSS are often based on open standards, which enrich not only the potential interoperability of software and the ability of different software to communicate with each other, but also help to prevent 'lock-in' should data migration from one system to another be required at some future date.[65] This is an important consideration given the speed with which digital technologies can progress. Therefore it was agreed to adhere to the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines as being those most suitable, appropriate, and protective of each project both now and in the future.[66] TEI is a joint industry, education and government non-profit driven initiative with many worldwide participants. It is hosted by the University of Virginia, Brown University, Oxford University, University of Lethbridge and a collaborative group based in Nancy, France that includes *Analyse*

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[64] Michelle Murrain, *Choosing and using free and open source software: a primer for nonprofits* (2007), http://nosi.net/node/463 [2 Aug. 2010].

[65] For a fuller discussion of the benefits of using FOSS and OSS see http://opensource.org/docs/osd [23 Apr. 2010]; http://open-source.gbdirect.co.uk/migration/benefit.html [23. Apr 2010]; http://webdevstudios.com/support/faq/why-use-open-source-software/ [23. Apr 2010].

[66] http://www.tei-c.org

et Traitement Informatique de la Langue Française, (ATILF), *L'Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique* (INIST). The mission of the TEI is to 'develop and maintain a set of high-quality guidelines for the encoding of humanities texts, and to support their use by a wide community of projects, institutions, and individuals'.[67]

Definition of Fields – Standardisation

Guided and supported by the team of the Digital Humanities Observatory, it was agreed that having collated the relevant data for each project, it was necessary to begin the coding and standardisation of that data in order to create an appropriate TEI schema. Coding and standardisation refers to the 'process of translating ambiguous source data into standardised codes for data processing'.[68] Standardisation processes are important in the establishment of compatibility and interoperability. In general, 'standardization determines and promulgates criteria to which objects or actions are expected to conform',[69] and although it can be seen as inflexible, it also allows for customisation.[70] Data was first presented in a standardised way in 'fields' within a *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheet. In collating the data, a number of decisions had to be made regarding the fields required. As further Dillon book titles were accessed for example, it emerged that additional fields would be needed to include the relevant information. Provision was also made for extra material which could be inserted at a later date. A total of twenty-seven fields were identified as most appropriate to classify known details of Eilís Dillon's literary output which comprises 58 original titles and 178 entries in total. The fields chosen are as follows and are accompanied by a brief explanation where necessary:

Code Number: Entries were numbered 1 to 178

Type: The form of publication. In all cases this was *book* but the creation of the field allows for other forms should they be discovered.

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[67] http://www.tei-c.org/About/mission.xml

[68] http://www.arts-humanities.net/user_tags/coding_standardisation [accessed 10 Aug. 2010].

[69] http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Sel-Str/Standardization.html#ixzz0wICQwHld [accessed 10 Aug. 2010].

[70] http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Sel-Str/Standardization.html#ixzz0wICQwHld [accessed 10 Aug. 2010].

ID: An identifying number, e.g. ED003, applied to the same book regardless of language or edition.

Master: The original book title in Irish or English.

Label: The title in translation or edition, if different.

Publication date: The year of publication.

ISBN: 10 digit or 13 digit International Standard Book Number

Author_surname: e.g. *Dillon* **Author_ givenname:** e.g. *Eilís*

Author: In just two cases Dillon was not the author but was translator and editor. This necessitated the creation of an extra field that could cater for other authors.

Editor_ surname **Editor_ givenname**

Illustrator _surname **Illustrator _ givenname**

Translator 1_ surname **Translator1_givenname**

Translator 2_ surname **Translator2_ givenname**

Original Language: *Irish or English*

Translation Language: Sixteen languages have been identified to date.

Genre: e.g. *fiction, non-fiction, academic*

Readership: e.g. *adult, teenage, children*

Target: e.g. *8-12 year olds*

Publisher_Name: e.g. *Funk and Wagnalls* **Publication City:** *New York*

Publication Country: *United States of America*

Keywords: A number of search terms are provided for each book, e.g. *West of Ireland, island, community life, adventure.* The search terms were chosen to comply with those generally used on literary websites.

A typical entry has the following or similar information arising from the suggested fields.

ED005 Book *The Lost Island* *Die Verborgne Insel* 1992
341016881
Dillon, Eilís
Sveinnson, Jon G.
English, German
fiction, teenage, children
Arena, Wurzburg, Germany, 1992
West of Ireland, island, adventure, adolescence, sea, tradition, community life

Although the data entry requirement for the three digitisation projects were different, each required a structured representation of data object properties. A master document in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format was established to suit each case. XML allows for combining and interoperability and again is an open, non-proprietary standard. Having one master document and an automated process allows for additional or revised data to be easily run through a PHP[71] conversion script to produce new data files for use with web functions. The data in the structured *Excel* document was then transformed into both TEI, a variant of XML, and JSON, a standard data interchange format. A Hyper Text Mark-up Language (HTML) page that provides the basic EXHIBIT functionality being demonstrated was also created. Further customisation of the HTML code to provide graphic enhancements and to modify the information being displayed could then be undertaken easily at a later date.

The formal documentation produced by the TEI Consortium defines and describes the encoding system. Working with the formal schema makes explicit certain features of a text in a manner that aids the processing of that text by computer programs.

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[71] PHP is a widely used general purpose scripting language specially suited to web design and can be embedded into html (Hyper-Text Mark-up Language)

As Susan Schreibmann describes, TEI makes explicit the following:

- Structural divisions within a text

  – title-page, chapter, scene, stanza, line, etc.

- Typographical elements

  –changes in typeface, special characters, etc.

- Other textual features

  – grammatical structures, location of illustrations, variant forms, etc.[72]

TEI features are shared easily across communities. Additional specialist features can be added or removed from a text while mark-up is user defined. However, in sustaining the concept of open source software and the philosophy of the creative commons community, TEI also provides adequate documentation of the text and its encoding. For example, the TEI header documents the electronic edition being created while the TEI body contains the content being created.

```
<tdclass="surname"><spanclass="surname"><span>Dillon</span>
</span></td>class="language"><span>English</span>
</span></td>
```

Additionally, TEI allows the search engine to find similar strings within the search even when spelled differently, or referred to by another name, an essential aid especially when using primary literary and biographical source material. It allows the editor to add this intelligence to the document via attribute values without altering the original text.[73]

```
<name key="Dillon, Eilís">Eilís</name>
<name key="Dillon, Eilís">Miss Dillon</name>
<rs key="Dillon, Eilís">the author</rs>
```

A TEI template was generated for each project and the collected data was encoded and converted into a TEI compliant schema. The converted data was checked and rechecked for any errors.

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[72] Susan Schreibman, 'The Text Encoding Initiative, an introduction', Digital Humanities Observatory Summer School (2010).

[73] Schreibman, 'The Text Encoding Initiative, an introduction'.

Style Sheets

Simply providing appropriate Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) styles within the HTML code itself controls the way that particular information appears on the web page. In other words, 'styles' define how to display elements.[74] For example, the need to provide italicisation within the reference sources is controlled by applying appropriate CSS in the HTML for that output, as are decisions about the font size of a line or a particular line of text. HTML was never intended to contain tags for formatting a document. Rather it was intended to define the content of a document such as:

<hl>This is a heading</hl> or <p>This is a paragraph</p>

Initially the addition of fonts or colour information had to be added to every page, involving considerable time and effort. With the creation of CSS by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in HTML 4.0, all formatting could be removed and stored in a separate CSS file.[75]

Web Page Development

It was agreed that the web page framework for each of the projects would be based on the open source software EXHIBIT, developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology Libraries (MIT Libraries) and its Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (MIT CSAIL) under the SIMILE Project and freely available under creative commons license.[76]

> The SIMILE Project and its members are fully committed to the open source principles of software distribution and open development and for this reason, it releases the created intellectual property (both software and reports) under a BSD-style license.[77]

The EXHIBIT software, a lightweight structured data publishing framework, enables website authors to create dynamic exhibits of their data without resorting to complex database and server technologies.[78] EXHIBIT is primarily a tool to allow a dataset to be fully searched using internet browsers. The advanced user interface, or lenses and views provided by EXHIBIT such as tile view, timelines, word clouds and information presentation were considered important elements for the proposed websites. They permitted each project to display a dataset very quickly and efficiently allowing the user to browse through data by selecting from what is available. As a result, the use of this framework faciliated a simple but powerful presentation and sharing of research data.

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[74] The styling and customisation of the exhibit framework is adequately outlined at their *Google* forum at http://www.simile-widgets.org/exhibit/ [24 Apr 2010].

[75] http://www.w3schools.com/css/css_intro.asp [25 Nov. 2010].

[76] David F. Huynh, David R. Karger, Robert C. Miller, 'Exhibit: lightweight structured data publishing', http://people.csail.mit.edu/dfhuynh/research/papers/www2007-exhibit.pdf [24 Apr 2010].

[77] http://smilie.mit.edu/wiki/SIMILE:About

Data Visualisation

A decision was made to include a number of visualisations on the website. Once again, these were chosen with a view to their potential use within all three projects. The aim of these visualisations was not just to improve the appearance of the website but to make information more accessible. A number of criteria were applied in selecting from the wide range of visualisation tools available. Tools chosen would have the ability to:

- permit the user to process information quickly and effortlessly and in an effective way
- highlight relevant features that are otherwise not easily or directly visible
- answer a range of search questions
- focus the user's attention on particular aspects
- enable comparative analysis showing trends and patterns
- provide for 'preattentive processing', that is, the facility to absorb information at a glance without the need for focused attention.

The process involved in data visualisation can be represented and explained as follows:

ACQUIRE → PARSE → FILTER → MINE →
REPRESENT → REFINE → INTERACT

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[78] http://simile.mit.edu/wiki/Exhibit [24 Apr. 2010].

- Acquire: Obtain the data
- Parse: Provide some structure for the data's meaning
- Filter: Remove all but the data of interest
- Mine: Apply methods from statistics to discern patterns
- Represent: Choose basic visual model (timeline, map)
- Refine: Improve representation to highlight key features
- Interact: Add methods to manipulate the data or features. [79]

The choice of tools was limited by considerations such as the:

- ability to access the particular tool either free of charge or by licence
- range of skills needed to implement the visualisation
- compatibility across three individual projects
- limitations of the EXHIBIT platform
- time constraints on the experts available.

Two visualisation tools were selected as being suited to all three projects. These were a timeline of the various chronologies and a *Google* map showing relevant locations.

Website Limitations

While the EXHIBIT platform or framework allows for a rich browsing experience using a variety of visualisations there are limitations attached it. For example, it can only be modified to a limited extent for individual use. During early testing one of the most significant issues was the failure of the browser *Internet Explorer* (though not *Firefox* or *Chrome*) to load a page. This error resulted from *Internet Explorer* throwing a warning over one dataset size that other browsers ignored. The page would only load if the warning was repeatedly acknowledged. However, this 'remedy' would be unsatisfactory to the end user and considerable time was spent rectifying the problem by reducing the number of columns of information being referenced.

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[79] Paolo Battino Visualisation Workshop, DHO Summer School RAI Dublin. June/July 2010.

Although the EXHIBIT framework is remarkable in its simplicity and in providing a rich set of features all within a page, not all functions presented were suitable to individual projects. It was agreed to adopt an overall uncomplicated interface design for the web page, giving due recognition to the funding and supporting bodies involved in the projects. A template was crafted that was usable by all three projects, and one that accounted for all of the various components that must be served. Working initially with the full set of EXHIBIT features, each researcher crafted her own set of requirements and added or deleted features as appropriate. For example the following faceted browser panes were inserted as suitable for the works of Eilís Dillon: *Original Publication Language, Genre, Readership, Illustrator, Translator,* and *Published in.* The intention is that extra browser panes can be added when time and funding allow for the inclusion of extra data.

Technical Limitations

As the projects neared completion, it was agreed to request three people to act as 'end user testers'. These testers brought their own diverse experiences and skills as an amateur historian/genealogist, a computer engineer and an educator to bear on the merits or otherwise of each website. Their feedback not only identified issues that had escaped the notice of the development team and the PhD students but also suggested areas for improvement. The exercise proved to be an invaluable and necessary undertaking prior to project completion. For example the testers identified the potential benefits of a printable version, a feature that would have considerably enhanced the function of the sites. However, the work was initially predicated upon providing an online dataset browse tool rather than a printable browser and such a facility would have entailed greater financial resources, further expertise and time, none of which was available to this project.

As previously noted, there are limitations to the EXHIBIT framework and indeed its use as FOSS for these projects development. One of the less desirable consequences of using OSS or FOSS technologies is generally a lack of supporting explanatory background documentation. Such added information would have allowed the Digital Humanities Observatory team to develop new software for, and within, the EXHIBIT framework to ensure compatibility and interoperability in the future. As EXHIBIT initially searches the entire dataset and not individual fields, it provides a limited rather than an advanced search. Although EXHIBIT was deemed most adaptable for the development of these projects, not all were equally suitable to the framework. For example the *Music Association of Ireland* (*MAI*) project requirements emerged as being the most difficult to develop in EXHBIT. With hindsight, a relational database format would have been more suitable to this project since the *MAI* project required the linking of all concert performance information in one search, a function not carried out within the EXHIBIT framework. However, working with the Digital Humanities Observatory team it was agreed that the best option was to draw up a code to enable the sharing of the information in the *Excel* dataset that would allow for the display of the requested information.

Licensing Issues

Advice was sought from the IT and Library departments of St Patrick's College concerning the most appropriate licence to adopt. In line with the open access ethos of the projects, careful consideration was given to the various types of Creative Commons Licences available.[80] Due regard was also paid not only to the copyright holder of each project but also to any conflicting copyright issues that might arise from the sources used. In the absence of academic guidelines in this area and in an effort to counteract future limitations, the developers exercised a degree of caution in selecting the final host site for the projects and the form of licensing that would apply to them. The following definitions outline the various types of licence available:

1. The Attribution Licence (cc by) lets others distribute, remix, adapt and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation. This is the most accommodating of licences offered, in terms of what others can do with your works licensed under Attribution.
2. The Attribution Share Alike Licence (cc by-sa) permits others to remix, adapt, and build upon your work even for commercial reasons, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.

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[80] http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses

This licence is often compared to open source software licences. All new works based on yours will carry the same licence, so any derivatives will also allow commercial use.

3. The Attribution No Derivatives Licence (cc by-nd) allows for redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you.
4. The Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike Licence(cc by-nc-sa) permits others to remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms. Others can download and redistribute your work just like the by-nc-nd licence, but they can also translate, make remixes, and produce new stories based on your work. All new work based on yours will carry the same licence, so any derivatives will also be non-commercial in nature.
5. The Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives Licence (cc by-nc-nd) is the most restrictive of the six main licences in allowing redistribution. It is often called the 'free advertising' licence because it allows others to download your works and share them with others as long as they mention you and link back to you, but they cannot change them in any way or use them commercially.

Following extensive consultation, and in agreement with the Dean of Research, it was agreed that the licence *Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike* or *ccby-nc-sa* would be best suited to each of the projects, both now and in the future. The documented decision to use this particular licence appears in Appendix A.

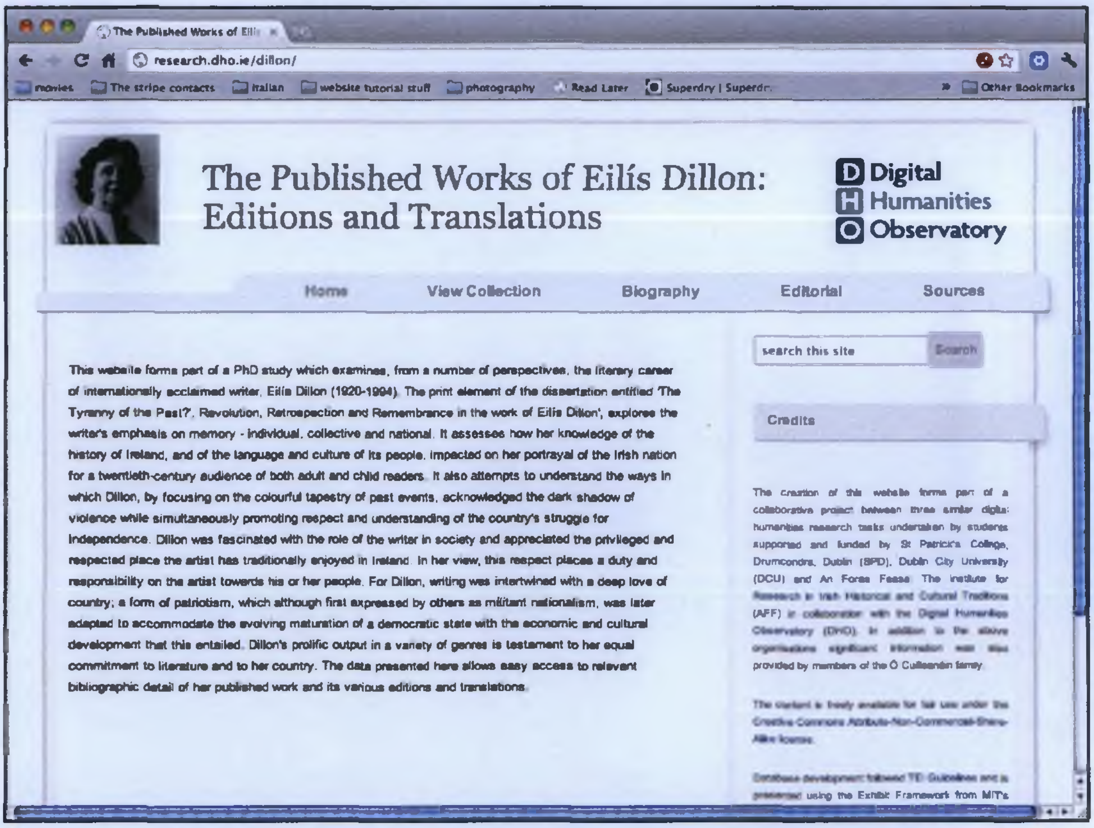
Description of the Website

The Published Works of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations.

http://research.dho.ie/dillon.html

The following is a description of elements of the website and includes visual examples of the content.

The homepage opens with a short introduction contextualising the project.



The Published Works of Eilís Dillon: Editions and Translations

This website forms part of a PhD study which examines, from a number of perspectives, the literary career of internationally acclaimed writer, Eilís Dillon (1920-1994). The print element of the dissertation entitled 'The Tyranny of the Past?', Revolution, Retrospection and Remembrance in the work of Eilís Dillon', explores the writer's emphasis on memory - individual, collective and national. It assesses how her knowledge of the history of Ireland, and of the language and culture of its people, impacted on her portrayal of the Irish nation for a twentieth-century audience of both adult and child readers. It also attempts to understand the ways in which Dillon, by focusing on the colourful tapestry of past events, acknowledged the dark shadow of violence while simultaneously promoting respect and understanding of the country's struggle for Independence. Dillon was fascinated with the role of the writer in society and appreciated the privileged and respected place the artist has traditionally enjoyed in Ireland. In her view, this respect places a duty and responsibility on the artist towards his or her people. For Dillon, writing was intertwined with a deep love of country; a form of patriotism, which although first expressed by others as militant nationalism, was later adapted to accommodate the evolving maturation of a democratic state with the economic and cultural development that this entailed. Dillon's prolific output in a variety of genres is testament to her equal commitment to literature and to her country. The data presented here allows easy access to relevant bibliographic detail of her published work and its various editions and translations.

Credits

The creation of this website forms part of a collaborative project between three similar digital humanities research tasks undertaken by students supported and funded by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin (SPD), Dublin City University (DCU) and An Foras Feasa: The Institute for Research in Irish Historical and Cultural Traditions (AFF) in collaboration with the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO). In addition to the above organisations significant information was also provided by members of the Ó Cuilleanáin family.

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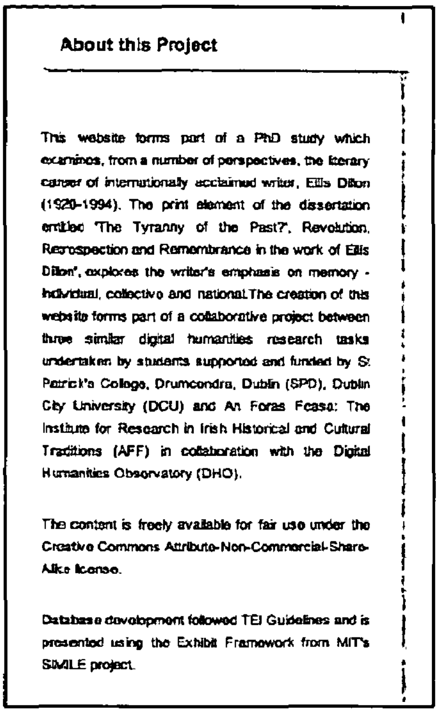
Database development followed TEI Guidelines and is presented using the Exhibit Framework from MIT's

Figure 1: Screen grab of website landing page & introduction

A side panel explains the origins and background to the project.



About this Project

This website forms part of a PhD study which examines, from a number of perspectives, the literary career of internationally acclaimed writer, Eilis Dillon (1920-1994). The print element of the dissertation entitled 'The Tyranny of the Past?'. Revolution, Retrospection and Remembrance in the work of Eilis Dillon', explores the writer's emphasis on memory - individual, collective and national.The creation of this website forms part of a collaborative project between three similar digital humanities research tasks undertaken by students supported and funded by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin (SPD), Dublin City University (DCU) and An Foras Feasa: The Institute for Research in Irish Historical and Cultural Traditions (AFF) in collaboration with the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO).

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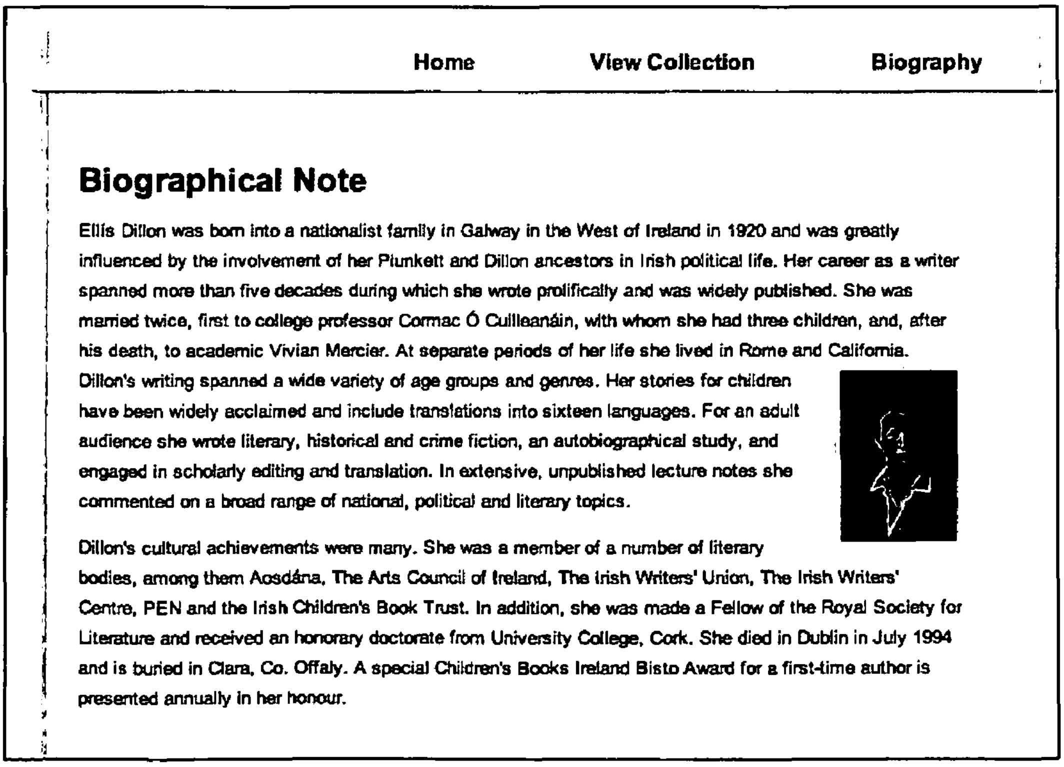
Database development followed TEI Guidelines and is presented using the Exhibit Framework from MIT's SIMILE project.

Figure 2: Screen grab of 'About' side panel.

Further context is provided by a biographical note on the author.



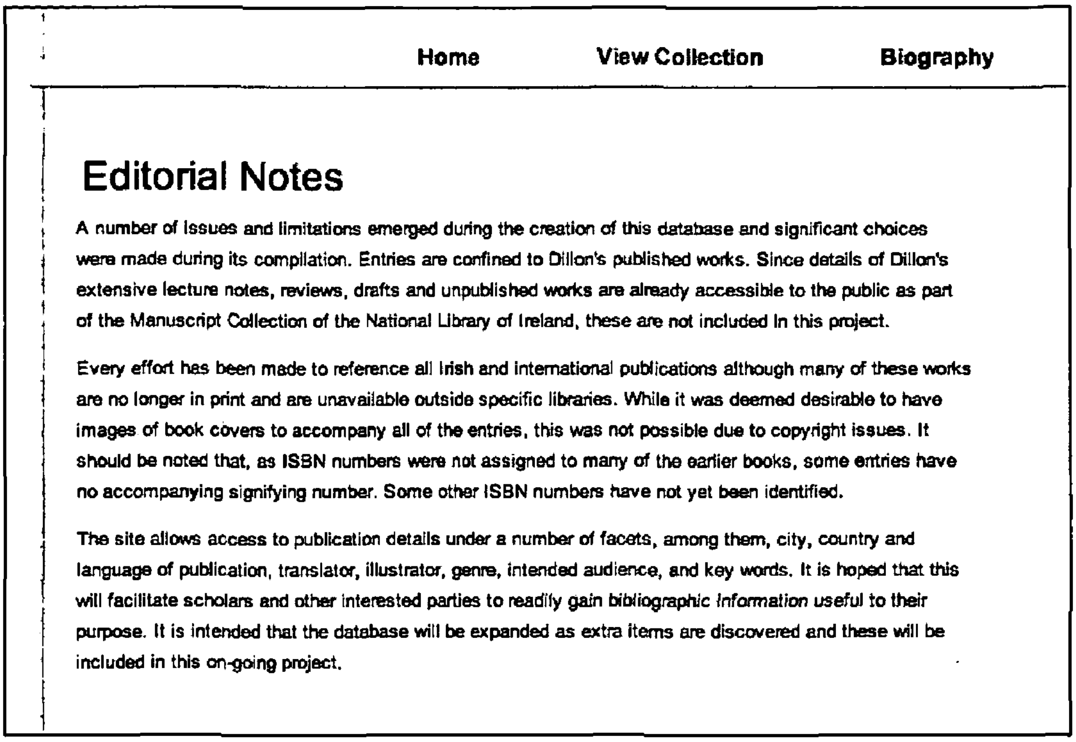
Biographical Note

Eilis Dillon was born into a nationalist family in Galway in the West of Ireland in 1920 and was greatly influenced by the involvement of her Plunkett and Dillon ancestors in Irish political life. Her career as a writer spanned more than five decades during which she wrote prolifically and was widely published. She was married twice, first to college professor Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, with whom she had three children, and, after his death, to academic Vivian Mercier. At separate periods of her life she lived in Rome and California. Dillon's writing spanned a wide variety of age groups and genres. Her stories for children have been widely acclaimed and include translations into sixteen languages. For an adult audience she wrote literary, historical and crime fiction, an autobiographical study, and engaged in scholarly editing and translation. In extensive, unpublished lecture notes she commented on a broad range of national, political and literary topics.

Dillon's cultural achievements were many. She was a member of a number of literary bodies, among them Aosdána, The Arts Council of Ireland, The Irish Writers' Union, The Irish Writers' Centre, PEN and the Irish Children's Book Trust. In addition, she was made a Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature and received an honorary doctorate from University College, Cork. She died in Dublin in July 1994 and is buried in Clara, Co. Offaly. A special Children's Books Ireland Bisto Award for a first-time author is presented annually in her honour.

Figure 3: Screen grab of 'Biography' webpage

A brief note gives details of the original editorial decisions made when inputting and presenting the data.



Editorial Notes

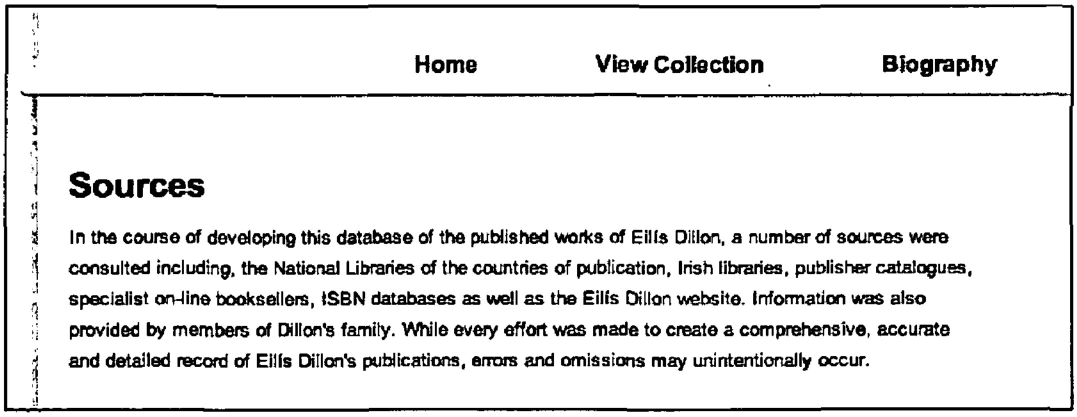
A number of issues and limitations emerged during the creation of this database and significant choices were made during its compilation. Entries are confined to Dillon's published works. Since details of Dillon's extensive lecture notes, reviews, drafts and unpublished works are already accessible to the public as part of the Manuscript Collection of the National Library of Ireland, these are not included in this project.

Every effort has been made to reference all Irish and international publications although many of these works are no longer in print and are unavailable outside specific libraries. While it was deemed desirable to have images of book covers to accompany all of the entries, this was not possible due to copyright issues. It should be noted that, as ISBN numbers were not assigned to many of the earlier books, some entries have no accompanying signifying number. Some other ISBN numbers have not yet been identified.

The site allows access to publication details under a number of facets, among them, city, country and language of publication, translator, illustrator, genre, intended audience, and key words. It is hoped that this will facilitate scholars and other interested parties to readily gain bibliographic information useful to their purpose. It is intended that the database will be expanded as extra items are discovered and these will be included in this on-going project.

Figure 4: Screen grab showing the 'Editorial Notes' panel.

A short paragraph indicates the sources used to access the data.



Sources

In the course of developing this database of the published works of Eilis Dillon, a number of sources were consulted including, the National Libraries of the countries of publication, Irish libraries, publisher catalogues, specialist on-line booksellers, ISBN databases as well as the Eilis Dillon website. Information was also provided by members of Dillon's family. While every effort was made to create a comprehensive, accurate and detailed record of Eilis Dillon's publications, errors and omissions may unintentionally occur.

Figure 5: Screen Grab of the 'Sources' panel

Users may view the collections by clicking as required on *List of Editions, Bibliography, Publishing Timeline and Map of Publishers.*

Evaluation of the Website

A number of criteria apply to the evaluation of any website. These include authority and accuracy, purpose and content, currency, design, organisation and ease of use.[81] Fortunately it was possible, thanks to the Digital Humanities Observatory, to secure a reputable host and domain giving academic credibility to the work as part of a PhD thesis. The purpose of the site is clarified in the introduction and the content is visibly accessible. It is hoped that this website can and will be modified, revised, and updated if extra data emerges and if additional funding is available in the future.

With regard to design, there are some navigational issues. For example, the timeline is confusing in that there are two levels within it, each functioning at different speeds and the split view as it currently stands is not very user friendly. In addition, the search capability provided by the browser is limited by the number of facets provided. It is not possible, for instance, to search for the names of publishers as these have been omitted due to the limited time available to the expert advisers. This was disappointing as the initial intention was to align Dillon to certain publishers and track her affiliations at various times in her career.

Although a study of the illustrations accompanying Dillon's work was not within the parameters of the overall thesis, it had been envisaged that the project would be enhanced by the inclusion of book cover images attaching to each entry. Unfortunately, due to a number of unforeseen factors, it was not possible to achieve this element. While a large number of images were accessed, there were legal copyright issues regarding their website publication as international permissions were difficult to attain and some publishing houses had ceased trading. However, this avenue may be pursued by future researchers who specifically wish to examine Dillon's work in translation and can possibly be added to the website at a later date.

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[81] http://www.lib.umd.edu/guides/evaluate.html

A small sample of Eilís Dillon's editions and translations is included below.

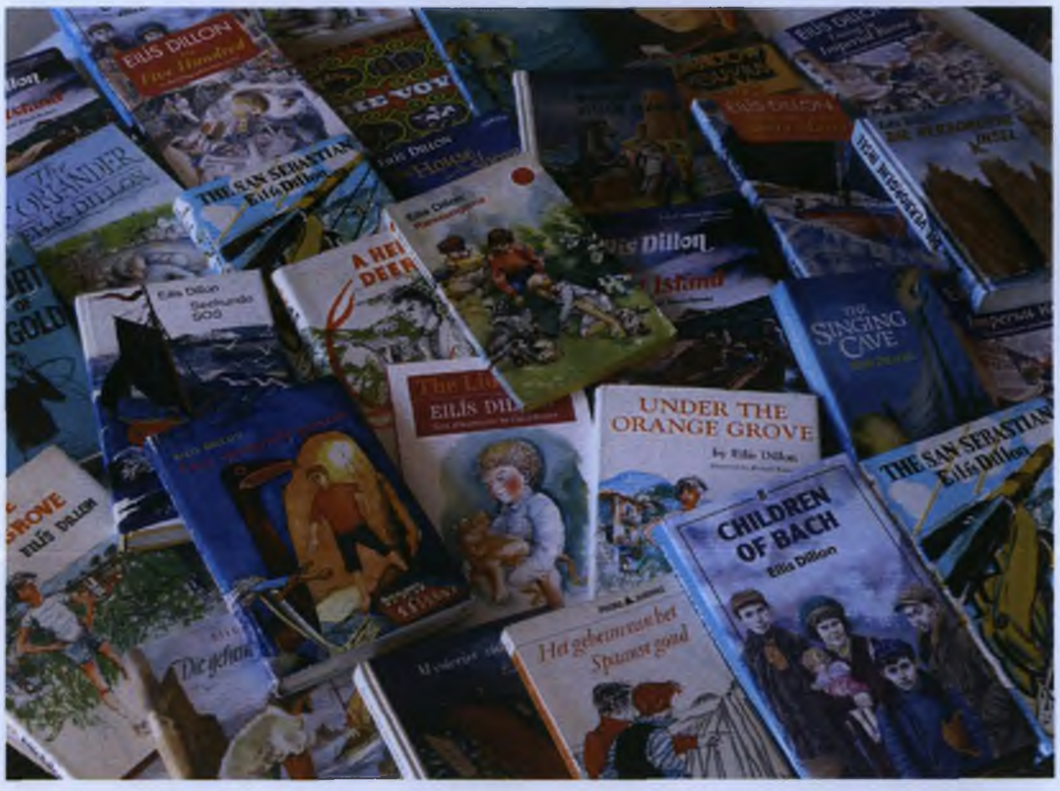

Figure 6: A small selection of Eilís Dillon's literary output

Despite the fact that not all of the initial aims of the three projects were realised, the creation of a website was a considerable achievement given the short time frame allotted, the necessity to simultaneously complete a thesis in the traditional PhD written format and the relative lack of digital experience of the three PhD candidates.

Conclusion: Evaluation of the Digital Humanities PhD Programme

The concept of a PhD study within digital humanities is innovative and exciting and it has been a privilege to be part of this initiative with *An Foras Feasa*, a pioneering body in this field. However, the fact that such a programme is, by its nature, ground-breaking has also led to some difficulties for all parties involved.

Questions arise about the preparedness of an Irish university to develop digital humanities programmes since securitisation of these three university-funded projects when completed has not been fully addressed at administrative level. Copyright issues, licensing, intellectual property, hosting and maintenance of the finished digital humanities projects are all of concern and require a re-interpretation of traditional university practices and procedures. Digital humanities copyright issues differ from the sciences in that it is not about how one manages the data or what is done with it, 'but what you are allowed to do with it' without being mired in copyright law. This is particularly relevant to film, photography and twentieth-century literature and was a major consideration for this researcher. Discussion abounds on how to 'reconcile the financial interests of rights holders with the scholarly interests of researchers'.[82] This issue still awaits clarification.

Since the conferring of the PhD is contingent on the production of a digital component, this group of students undertook an additional workload. The challenges were numerous, among them the identification of a suitable digital project, the acquisition of technical skills, the division of labour within a collaborative study, the lack of digital humanities PhD role models and the absence of a template for a digital project of this nature within a doctoral programme.

For students, the prescribed three-year time frame proved exceptionally demanding in integrating the digital project into the normal humanities PhD framework. In particular, the immediate urgency to gain a skills set suited to the task proved daunting, particularly for those without prior knowledge or experience in what was a new area of study and technological development. While seminars were provided by *An Foras Feasa* on a number of related topics it was not possible, given the various levels of technical knowledge within the group, to cater adequately to individual needs. Future students would benefit from a fourth year of support in order to complete digital projects to a higher standard. Alternatively, it could be argued that digital studies would be better suited to post-doctoral work based on a completed humanities doctoral thesis.

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[82] Lesk, *From Data to Wisdom.*

A further inequality arose in relation to the allocated length of the dissertation since academic council makes no provision for the inclusion of such a project within a 'normal' PhD word count. It was therefore agreed that the most appropriate solution was to submit the digital project as a second volume appendix to the whole. There were few previously conferred digital humanities PhD theses from which to draw guidance or to examine the optimal presentation of a digital humanities methodology. Therefore, there was the added awareness of pioneering a new form of PhD research and the attendant stresses that this entailed.

Commenting on the fact that representational technologies like XML, TEI, databases and digital visualisation tools are often viewed as segregated from the study of humanities, Flanders remarks that humanities scholarship 'has historically understood this separateness as indicating an ancillary role – that of the handmaiden, the good servant / poor master – in which humanities insight masters and subsumes what these technologies can offer'. This, in her view, leads to an 'unease' between the two communities, but one which can prove productive, in that it challenges pre-conceptions, questions traditional notions of learning and leads to meaningful interdisciplinary engagement. This sense of unease is positive, involving 'the same oscillating, dialectical pulsation that is the scholarly mind at work'. Flanders states that 'while digital tools add a challenge and give us a new set of terms – like a new planet in the system, they change the vectors of all the other things we have in our universe'. But questions continue and Flanders urges us to judge the state of progress in the digital humanities by asking: 'Does it make us think? Does it make us keep thinking?'[83] These basic queries continue to be at the heart of successful research within all disciplines old and new. With considerable commitment from students, academic communities and supporting bodies, digital humanities will continue to be at the forefront of innovative study.

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[83] Flanders, Julia, "The Productive Unease of 21st Century Digital Scholarship", *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Summer 2009, Vol. 3, No. 3. http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/3/000055/000055.html [accessed 30 Mar 2010).

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http://books.google.com
http://www.amazon.com/Search-Inside-Book-Books/b?ie=UTF8&node=10197021
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/special/states/docs/sou98.html
http://books.google.com
http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses
http://humanities.uchichago.edu/orgs/ARTFL/
http://opensource.org/docs/osd
http://open-source.gbdirect.co.uk/migration/benefit.html
http://simile.mit.edu/wiki/Exhibit
http://simile.mit.edu/wiki/ExhibitFor Authors

http://webdevstudios.com/support/faq/why-use-open-source-software/

http://www.amazon.com/Search-Inside-Book-

Books/b?ie=UTF8&node=10197021

http://www.archive.org/details/millionbooks

http://www.arts-humanities.net/user tags/coding standardisation

http:// www.digitalhumanities.org/humanist

http://www.gutenberg.org

http://www.h-net.org/~albion

http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/SelStr/Standardization.html

#ixzz0wICQwHld

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http://www.simile-widgets.org/exhibit/

http://www.tlg.uci.edu/

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http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/special/states/docs/sou98.htm

Appendix A

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE
DRUMCONDRA, DUBLIN 9
COLÁISTE PHÁDRAIG
DROIM CONRACH, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 9

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF RESEARCH & HUMANITIES
OIFIG AN DHÉIN THAIGHDE & LÉINN DHAONNA

Tel./Fax.: 00353 1 884 2078
Mobile: 00353 86 854 9626
Email: Mary.Thompson@spd.dcu.ie

25 August 2010

Dear Gaye

In response to your request for clarification on license agreements in relation to the website that forms part of the digitized element of your PhD study, I outline some recommendations below, but leave the ultimate decision to yourself.

Of the choices available to you, I suggest that you consider option 1, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 (cc-by-sa) if you do not intend to use your material commercially, in a book, or in a subscription website. After discussion with the DHO and SPD library and after referring the matter to the IT staff, we had considered recommending another option, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (cc-by-nc-sa)—and recommend that you study this option carefully also—but now believe that '1' may be appropriate although it does allow for commercial use.

I recommend you have a look at the 4C Initiative web page at http://4cinitiative.com/?page_id=39. On this there is a lecture given by Ahrash Bissell in which he explains the logic behind decision-making, entitled Session 2: Copyright for Educational Digital Content & Creative Commons (Ahrash Bissell). Bissell notes that there has been a good deal of unnecessary use of the 'Non-Commercial' (NC) licence within education, and that NC is for people who think that they themselves will make a commercial product (eg. a book or subscription website) from their material and wish to prevent rival products. He goes on to say that where the creators do not intend to use their material commercially, NC is probably not necessary. Any commercial users would have to attribute your (freely available) original material, so presumably their product would have to have some kind of added value from the original. He argues that you may not wish to prevent such work - eg. a book which uses your research (and attributes it to you).

As you know, it is important for your status as a scholar that your work be cited by other scholars. Therefore you want to encourage any means that facilitates this and option 1 is probably most effective.

There is no single solution to issues such as these: the choice depends on the aspects I have mentioned already above, inter alia. Ultimately, the decision is yours. If you wish to discuss the matter further, please contact Liam O'Dwyer in the library who has expertise in this area and will help you tease out the implications of the various options open to you.

I recommend that you document the process of seeking permission and the response (ie, this letter) as part of your methodology.

As discussed, I will send a version of this letter to the other An Foras Feasa doctoral fellows with a recommendation that they also acknowledge you in their methodology.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Mary Shine Thompson

Mary Shine Thompson PhD
Dean of Research and Humanities
An Déan Taighde agus Léinn Dhaonna
St Patrick's College Drumcondra

Glossary:

Coding & standardisation	Refers to the process of translating ambiguous source data into standardised codes for data processing.
Interface design	The design of the system or interface with which a user has direct contact and with which they interact to conduct activities.
Resource sharing	Provision of data on a peer-to-peer network or similar means, allowing users to share information and content and conduct research collaboratively.
Standardisation	Determines and promulgates criteria to which objects or actions are expected to conform.
CSS	Cascading Stylesheets define styles such as borders, margins, font size and so forth for HTML pages.
HTML	HyperText Markup Language, the language used to write and create web pages.
Namespace	Namespaces are collections of XML elements that belong to some common vocabulary. All TEI elements belong to the TEI namespace.
ODD	One Document does it all: document describing a TEI schema.
TEI	Text Encoding Initiative
URL	Uniform Resource Locator. An internet address. A URL need not be absolute but can also be relative to the current address such as 'image/page5.jpg'
XML	Extensible Mark-up Language. Used within the TEI as a generic syntax for encoding properties, structural and others, of texts. The TEI encoding scheme is applied using XML, but non-textual data structures can also be expressed using XML.
XML Schema	A schema describes the elements and attributes that can occur in an XML document. A schema is necessary for XML validation. The TEI uses three schema languages DTD, XSD (also known as W3C Schema) and Relax NG.
XSLT	Extensible Stylesheet Language - Transformations. Language that is used to define transformations from XML documents into new XML documents, HTML documents, or plain text documents.
Free software	Pertains to software that is written under an open source licence, and can be freely copied, modified and re-distributed. Also referred to as Free Open Source Software (FOSS) or Open Source Software (OSS).
Libre	A term used by free software advocates to talk about software freedom, not in terms of cost, but in terms of what you can do with it such as read the source code, modify it and/or redistribute it.
Open Standards	An open standard is a standard for data or file

	format that is approved by a standards body, documented, and anyone can adopt without cost. Most FOSS software uses open standards, most proprietary software does not.
Proprietary software	Software that is a closed source. Users cannot see the source code, copy the software, or use it in any way other than specified by the strict licensing provided by the vendor.
Source Code	The instructions, written in a form readable and understandable by programmers that direct how an application should run. When changes or bug fixes are made to an application, these changes must be made in the source code. After the source code is complete, most applications are compiled into a binary form. A computer can read the binary form of an application more quickly and easily. However it is impossible to understand or modify an application in binary form if you do not have access to the original source code that created it.
Version Numbering	All software that is released to the public is assigned a version number, which helps to keep track of the status of that software, and allows users to know whether it is the most up to date.